OLD!

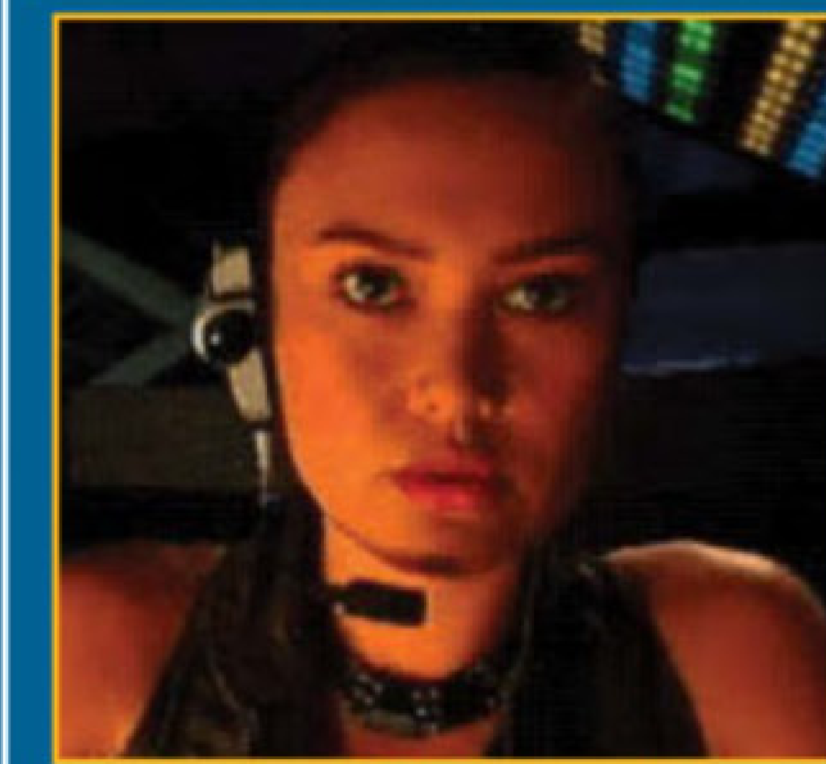
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER

AMS… DORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO … MOBILE

THE FALL OF FMV

THE HIGHS AND LOWS BEHIND THIS FAILED EXPERIMENTAL GENRE



ROADBLASTERS

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ATARI'S FUTURISTIC DYSTOPIAN BLASTER

TAU CETI

PETE COOKE REVISITS HIS SPECTRUM SCI-FI EPIC

RAMPAGE

WE SMASH APART THE HISTORY BEHIND THE CLASSIC ARCADE FRANCHISE

PEW! PEW!

SUPER TURRICAN

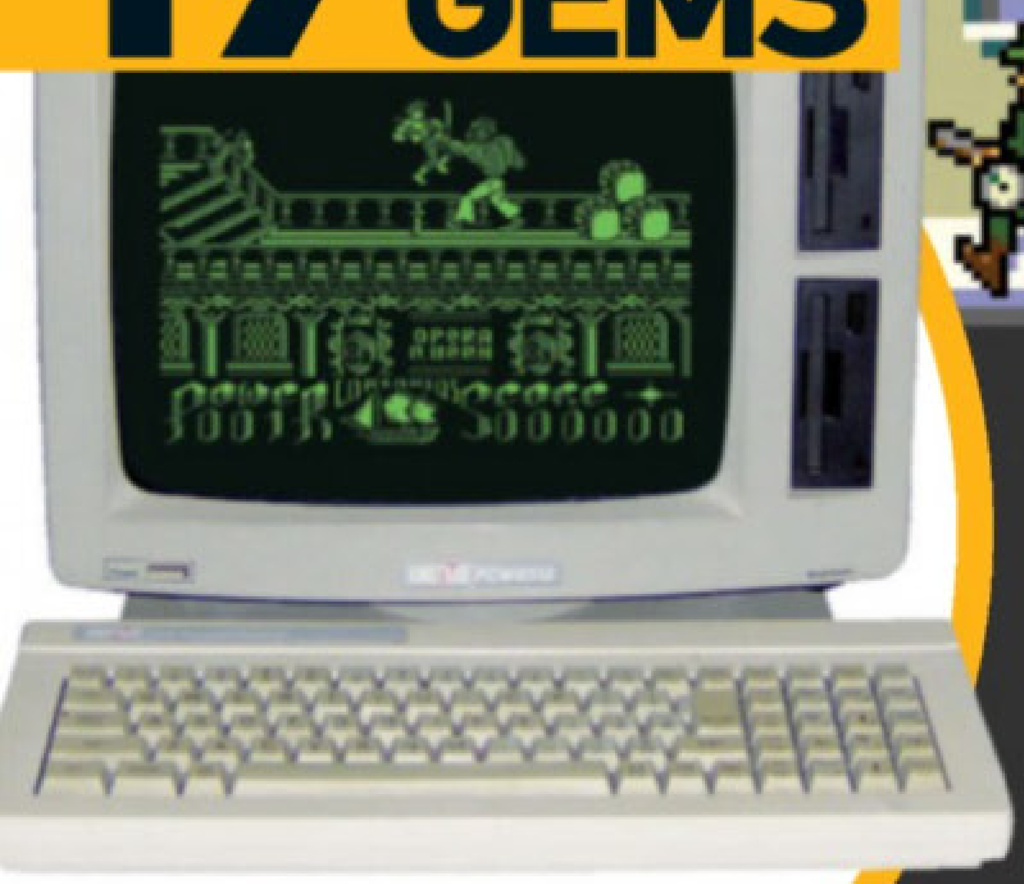
IS MANFRED TRENZ'S 16-BIT RUN-AND-GUN STILL AMAZING?

20 YEARS OF

ELDER SCROLLS

BEHIND THE SCENES OF BETHESDA'S EPIC SERIES

19 PCW GEMS



IN THIS SMASHING ISSUE:

- MONSTER MAX
- WWF SMACKDOWN 2
- MARIO IS MISSING
- OLLIOLLI
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
- MEV DINC

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
Digital Edition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 131

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE FMV GAME



DARRAN JONES

Silpheed. An absolutely astonishing shooter that really felt like an epic arcade game at the time. It still holds up exceptionally well today.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Thomas Was Alone

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

It's got to be *Night Trap* – I appreciate more as an ambitious design than a gameplay experience, but I'm a sucker for B-movies so it's right up my street.

Expertise:
Coin-ops, Sega hardware and everything Nineties

Currently playing:
Wipeout 2048

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



CRAIG GRANNELL

For the most part, I've never been a fan of these games, but does *The Walking Dead* count? If so: *The Walking Dead*, which is rather good. If not…

Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play

Currently playing:
Doug Dug for iPad

Favourite game of all time:
HERO



STEVE HOLMES

I've never played an FMV game. After watching Nick play several of them I'm glad. Give me the crap live-action intro from *Resident Evil* and bugger off FMV.

Expertise:
Gross incandescence

Currently playing:
Sniper Elite III

Favourite game of all time:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time



JONATHAN WELLS

For me it has to be *Star Wars: Rebel Assault II*. I remember being blown away when I first played it round a friend's.

Expertise:
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
Max And The Curse Of Brotherhood

Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island



PAUL DRURY

Unquestionably *Dragon's Lair*. The first time I played it in an arcade in Nottingham was like the moment when Dorothy stepped into Oz and everything went technicolour.

Expertise:
Marathon gaming toilet arrangements

Currently playing:
Wolfenstein: The New Order

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



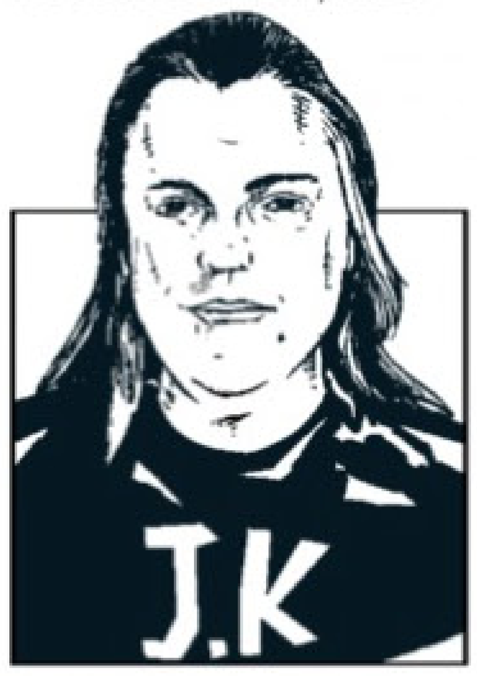
PAUL DAVIES

FMV games… well, in the end I really did enjoy *Sewer Shark*, more surprised that it worked than anything. I remember the window was quite small though. And grainy. And green.

Expertise:
Finding every last detail

Currently playing:
The Last Of Us

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



JASON KELK

I've never been a fan of FMV games, but I'll go with *Novastorm* just for some okay-ish shooting.

Expertise:
Indie, homebrew and bedroom-coded games.

Currently playing:
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

Favourite game of all time:
Io



MARTYN CARROLL

The groundbreaking *Dragon's Lair*. There was some magic at work there.

Expertise:
Sinclair computers, Spectrum software

Currently playing:
Dark Souls

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...



I can still recall the first time I witnessed the future of gaming. It was a triple whammy of *Night Trap*, *Star Wars: Rebel Assault* and *The 7th Guest*, courtesy of a Mega CD and two PCs playing in my local computer shop. I wasn't able to play them due to the lack of controllers, but I remember looking at all three games and being blown away by what they promised.

I've always had a love of movies, and games like *Night Trap* seemed like the perfect blend of two of my favourite pastimes. Realising that a PC was well out of my reach at the time, I started saving and managed to pick up a second-hand Mega CD a good year later with a selection of decent games, including *Night Trap* and *Sonic CD*. I also went out and bought *TomCat Alley* and wished I hadn't bothered. Mechanically the game was sound enough, but it was constantly cutting to annoying clips that ranged from your pilot pressing a button, to an Airfix plane blowing up in spectacular fashion. Fine the first couple of times you witnessed them, incredibly irritating after even your fifth game.

TomCat Alley was a classic example of being careful what you wished for. FMV might not have been perfect, but I can still remember the exciting buzz it gave me at the time. If only new games did that to me now…



retro GAMER

GAMING ICON

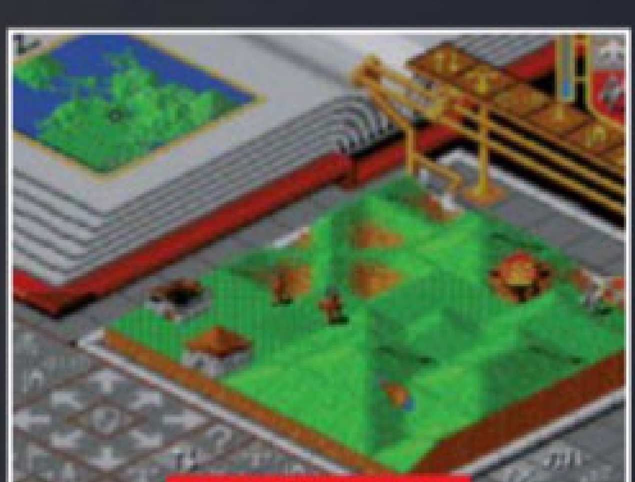
Is Peter Molyneux gaming's greatest icon?

With the new generation now in full swing we felt it was the perfect time to celebrate some of gaming's biggest icons for an exciting upcoming feature.

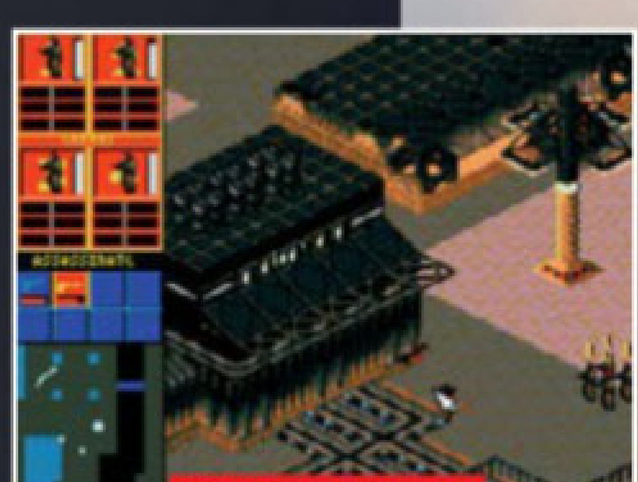
Help **Retro Gamer** find the many important individuals who have turned our favourite pastime into one of the world's biggest forms of entertainment, so that we can give them the recognition they deserve in a future issue. Whether you believe it was Shigeru Miyamoto who refreshed the gaming landscape, or that Nolan Bushnell heralded the start of the industry as we know it, we'd love to have your input. As always the best suggestions will appear in the magazine, so take this chance to join in the celebrations and have your say.

You can tell us about your favourite industry veterans on the **Retro Gamer** forum, our Facebook page, or even via Twitter using **#videogameicons**.

We look forward to your suggestions…



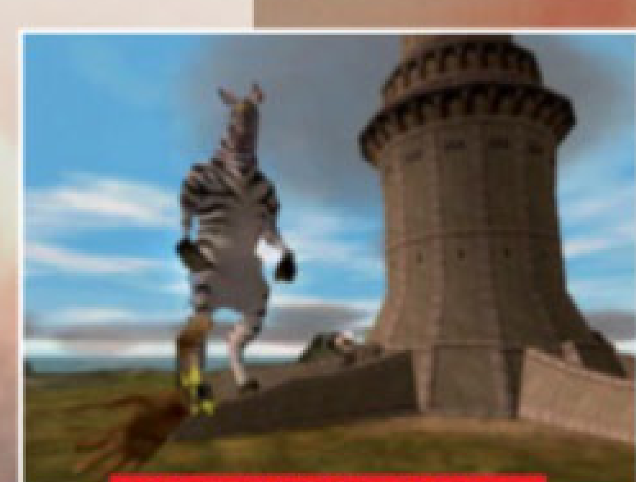
POPULOUS



SYNDICATE



DUNGEON KEEPER



BLACK & WHITE



FABLE

What's your favourite **Peter Molyneux** game? Let us know >>>

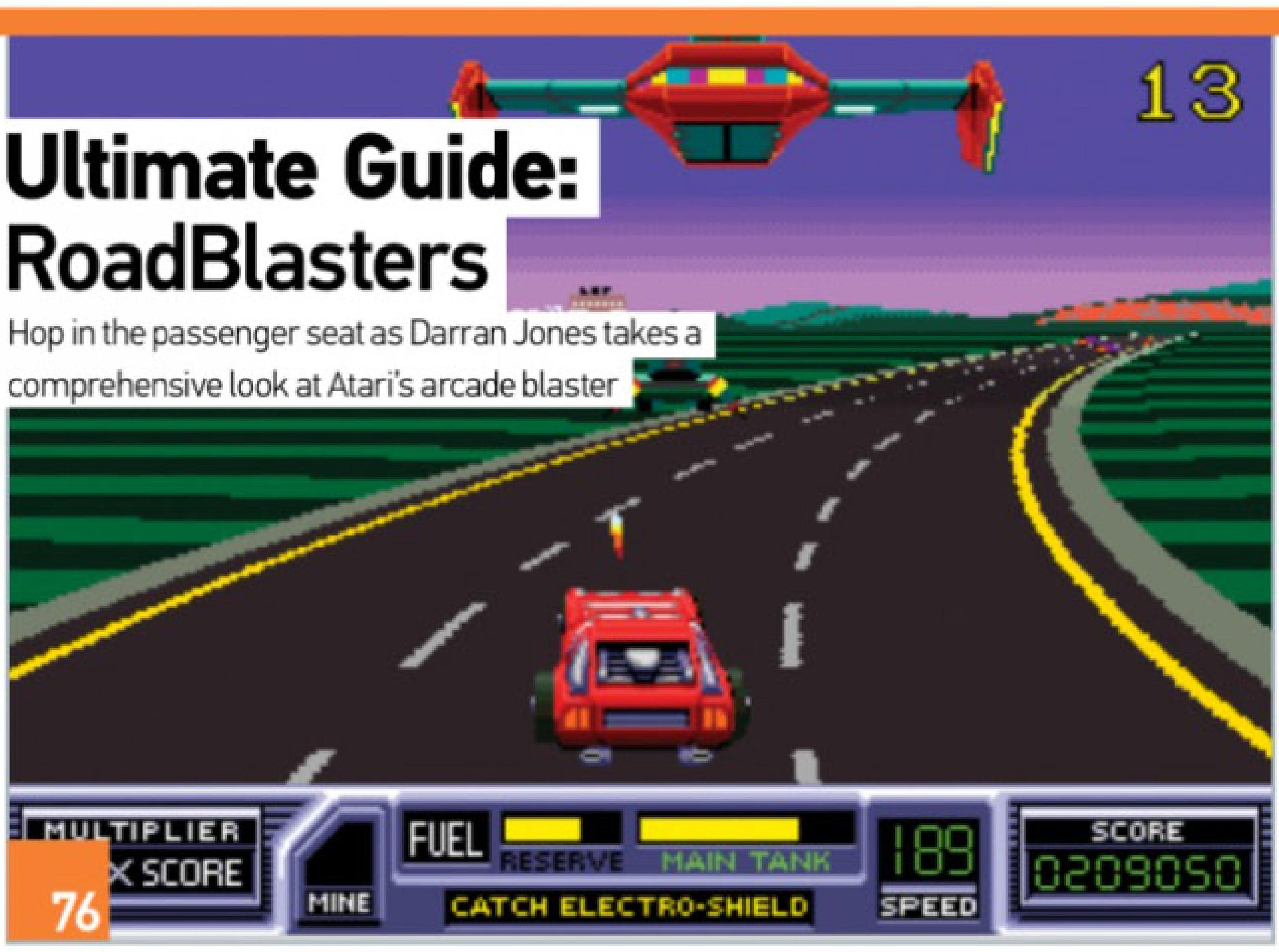


"I have to resist the temptation of coding every day and I do miss it so much"

Peter Molyneux

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>> Load 131 Breathing new life into classic games









RETRO RADAR

REVIVALS

FEATURED



Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

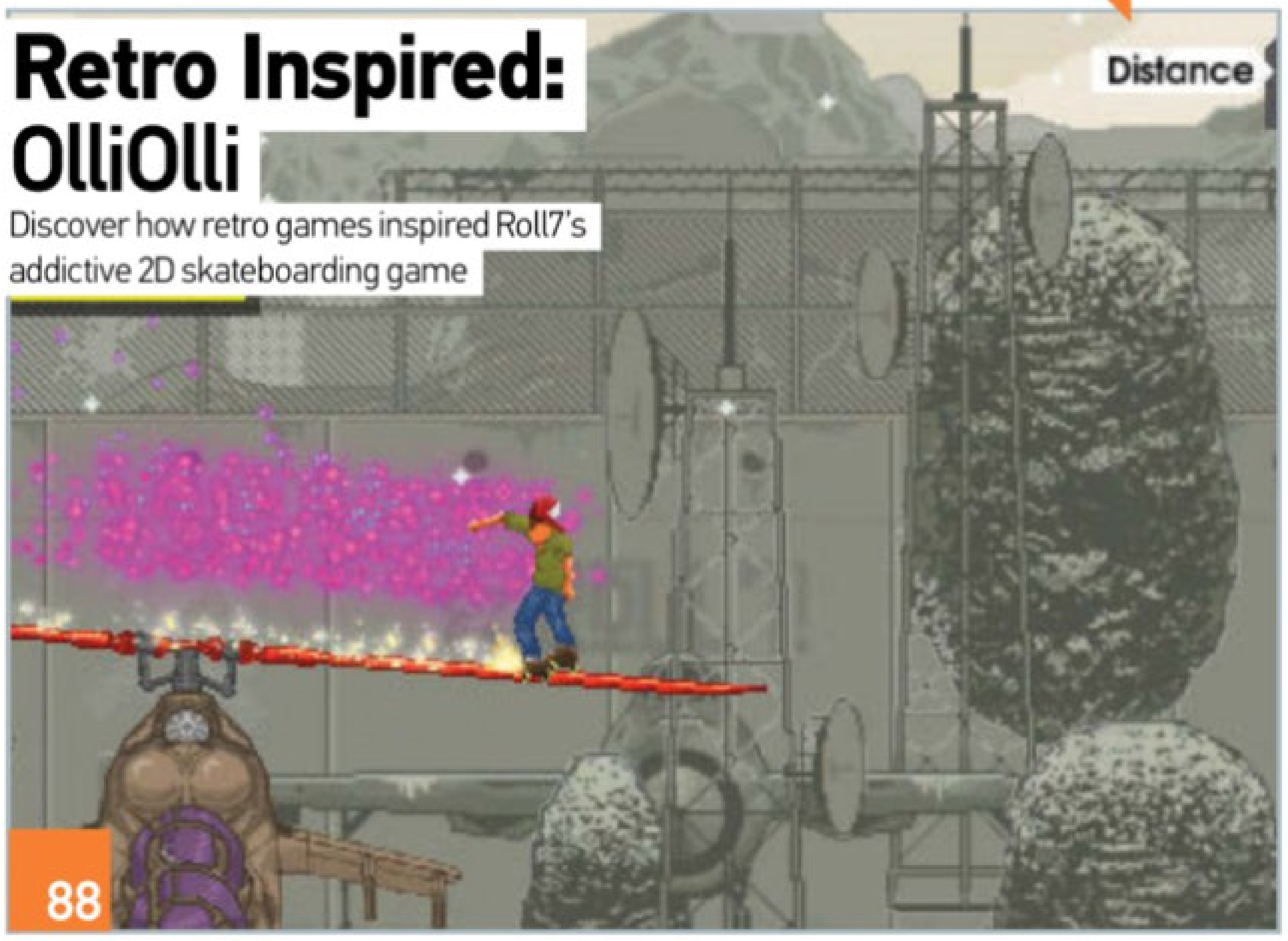
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk







> "It took the FPS and deconstructed all the tropes that were driving it to stagnation"
> Dom Peppiatt





REVIEWS





ESSENTIALS



retro radar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> E3 means games, lots and lots of new games. Nintendo showed off its open-world Zelda, while Warner impressed with the wonderfully over-the-top Mortal Kombat X and the new Gauntlet

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INCOMING!

READERS WEIGH IN ON THIS YEAR'S BIG GAMES

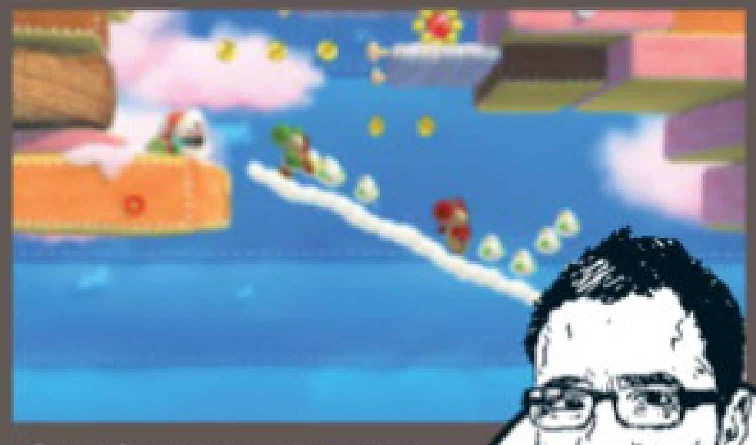


» [Wii U] We've been hoping for a huge open-world *Zelda* game for years.

Everybody loves surprises, but few would have expected the one that was revealed at this year's E3. At Sony's press conference, Adam Boyes, VP of publisher and developer relations, highlighted a letter that had apparently been sent in by a young girl called Sally T who was asking for the return of classic adventure games. The young girl was soon revealed to be none other than Tim Schafer, which was when Boyes dropped a bombshell – *Grim Fandango* is to receive a full HD makeover, courtesy of Double Fine and an as yet unnamed developer.

Fans predictably went wild, with Schafer responding by tweeting "thanks to @PlayStation @DisneyInteract & @lucasartsgames we're bringing *Grim Fandango* back! Remastered for PS4+VITA! ¡Viva la Revolución!" Initially the classic 15-year-old adventure game will be heading to PlayStation 4 and PS Vita, although that's only likely to be for a limited time. "Talk about other platforms soon!" was the tweet from Schafer when fans started asking for other versions. "Sony's been a great help making this happen & we're excited to be working with them on the console version!"

The news has certainly pleased readers, with forum member Postie Doc revealing that: "*Grim Fandango* on Vita has the potential to be spectacular. I know it is an old game but one of the few flaws with the original on PC is the clunky control system. In my opinion it is the best adventure game of all time and if you have never played it before, Vita may be the version to get." IronMaidenRule was equally pleased about the announcement, going on to say: "nice to see all the great classic adventure games getting the HD treatment, just waiting for *Full Throttle* and *Toonstruck* next."



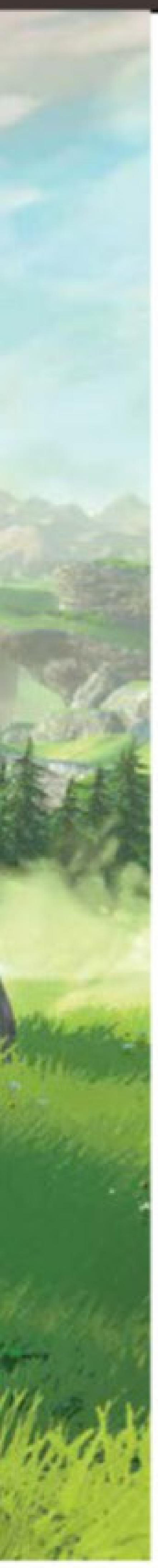
» [Wii U] *Yoshi's Woolly World* looks delightful, with truly stunning visuals.



» [PC] There's no news of a PC port yet, but we can't see it not happening.



» [Xbox One] We really enjoyed *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light*, so a four-player sequel sounds great fun.



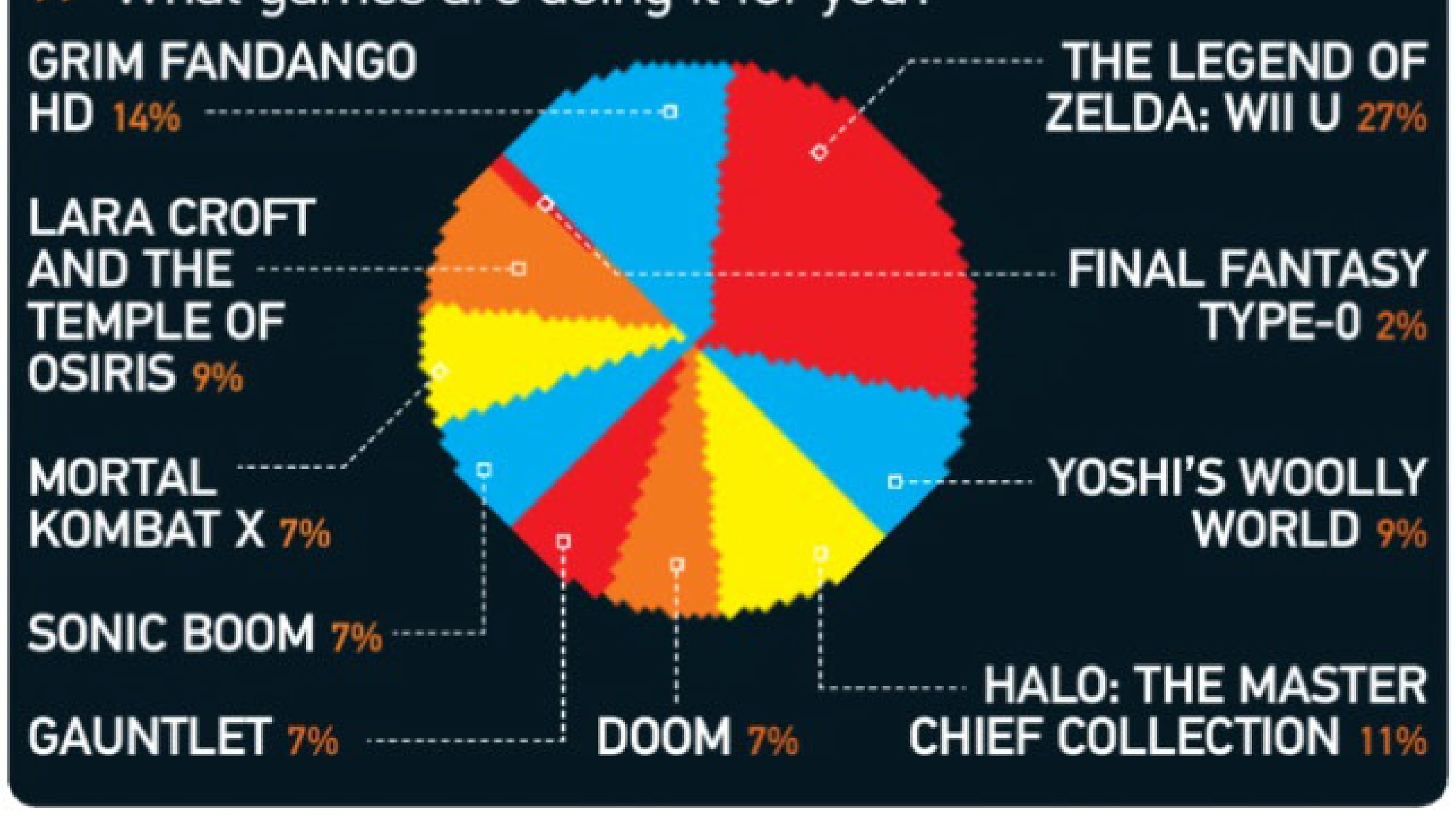


» [PC] The colours look a little drab, but *Gauntlet*'s developer appears to have nailed its atmosphere.

NT NICK'S PICK

READER'S POLL

» What games are doing it for you?



"Gauntlet could be lots of fun, but only if the price is right"

Treguard

Sony wasn't the only company to surprise, with Nintendo having a very solid presentation, and arguably the funniest one in recent memory. While it was depressing to see the likes of *Super Smash Bros* and *Bayonetta 2* being wheeled out for their third E3s it did manage to show some brand new IPs and its *Skylanders* alternative *Amiibo*. It also officially revealed its new open-world *Zelda* game, showed off the excellent looking *Yoshi's Woolly World* and revealed *Kirby And The Rainbow Curse*, which reminds us of the original Kirby DS game. Another interesting addition was *Mario Maker*, which allows you to create 2D Mario levels using the Wii U's controller. A new Starfox game was also announced before the event, but not shown.

"Nintendo definitely 'won' E3 this year, which makes a change," commented TheNewMonkey. Pratty was also impressed with Nintendo's output, but remains unconvinced about how the games will affect the fate of Nintendo's console. "I think if the Wii U was ever going to be a success it would have started by now, but hopefully it can at least achieve GameCube-level respectability and treat its owners to some great games. It's important Nintendo keep hitting gamers with high profile releases; *Zelda* and whatever Retro have up their sleeves might be just as crucial."

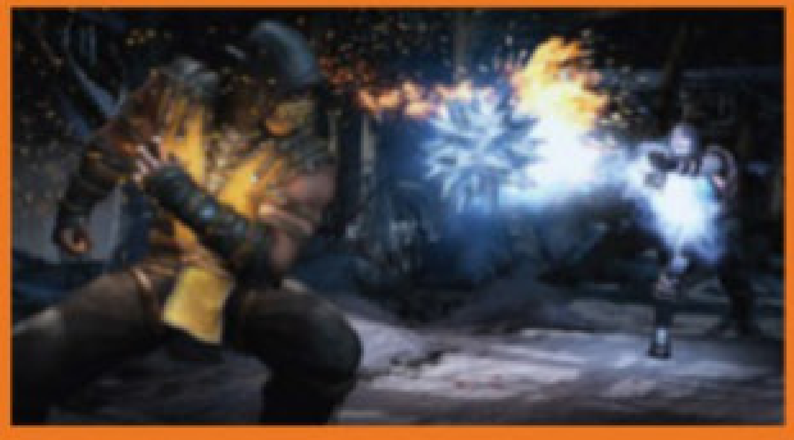
One of our highlights of E3 came from Warner Bros. It's typically not a publisher you'd link with retro franchises, but it had two to show off. *Gauntlet* looks like a long overdue revitalisation of the classic franchise, offering *Diablo*-style gameplay and the same strong focus on multiplayer. "I'm liking the look of *Gauntlet*," admitted forum member Crusto. "[I] can see myself and my lad playing this together fighting for grub etc (if this still applies)." Treguard on the other hand was a little more cautious… "*Gauntlet* could be lots of fun, but only if the price is right. It's a bit too shallow to warrant a full-price release."

Warner's other surprise was *Mortal Kombat X*, which looks ridiculously good fun. New characters were shown off, while the revealed Fatalities were truly brutal. Negative Creep gave the hardcore trailer a solid thumbs up, saying: "*MKX* is looking pretty awesome, and I can't wait to see what the rest of the roster is going to be."

Another interesting reveal was the news that Microsoft was working on a brand new *Halo* compilation for Xbox One. The original game is now 13 years old, while *Halo 2* celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Microsoft is celebrating with the release of *The Master Chief Collection*, a massively overhauled update of the first four games, which will received enhanced lighting, 60 frames per second and 1080p resolution. *Halo 2* will also feature a similar anniversary update to the one that appeared for the original *Halo* in 2011. While the franchise is obviously much newer than the others featured here, certain readers are still excited for it. Gman72 stated: "I'm all over *Halo* Collection like a bad rash."

Other highlights included a surprise four-player sequel to *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* – a new *Tomb Raider* was also announced, but little was shown – a Western release of the popular PSP game *Final Fantasy Type-0* and a very, very limited reveal of id Software's new *Doom* game. The latter may have been just a short teaser trailer but it worked its magic on thompson9980. "There's only one game in that list for me and it's *Doom*. Seeing the Cyber Demon in the teaser trailer, holy crap! I can't wait to see this game!" Let's hope id Software doesn't let him down… ★

OUR HIGHLIGHTS » The games we can't wait to play



MORTAL KOMBAT X

■ This was easily one of the highlights of E3 for us, mainly because it looks like so much fun. Developer NetherRealm Studios appears to be pushing the realms of bad taste as far as it can, but it's making for a spectacular looking game. NetherRealm is also expanding the roster, having so far announced four new characters, including Ferra/Torr, who appears to have been inspired by *Mad Max 3*'s Master Blaster, and Cassie Cage, the daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: WII U

■ Sadly, it would appear that it's still going to be a while until Zelda's first new HD adventure is released, with Nintendo bandying around a date of 2015. It looks like it will be worth it though, with its creators revealing it will be set in a world that will have less emphasis on defined entrances and exits for each dungeon. Hopefully it's going to be taking pointers from *A Link Between Worlds*.



GRIM FANDANGO HD

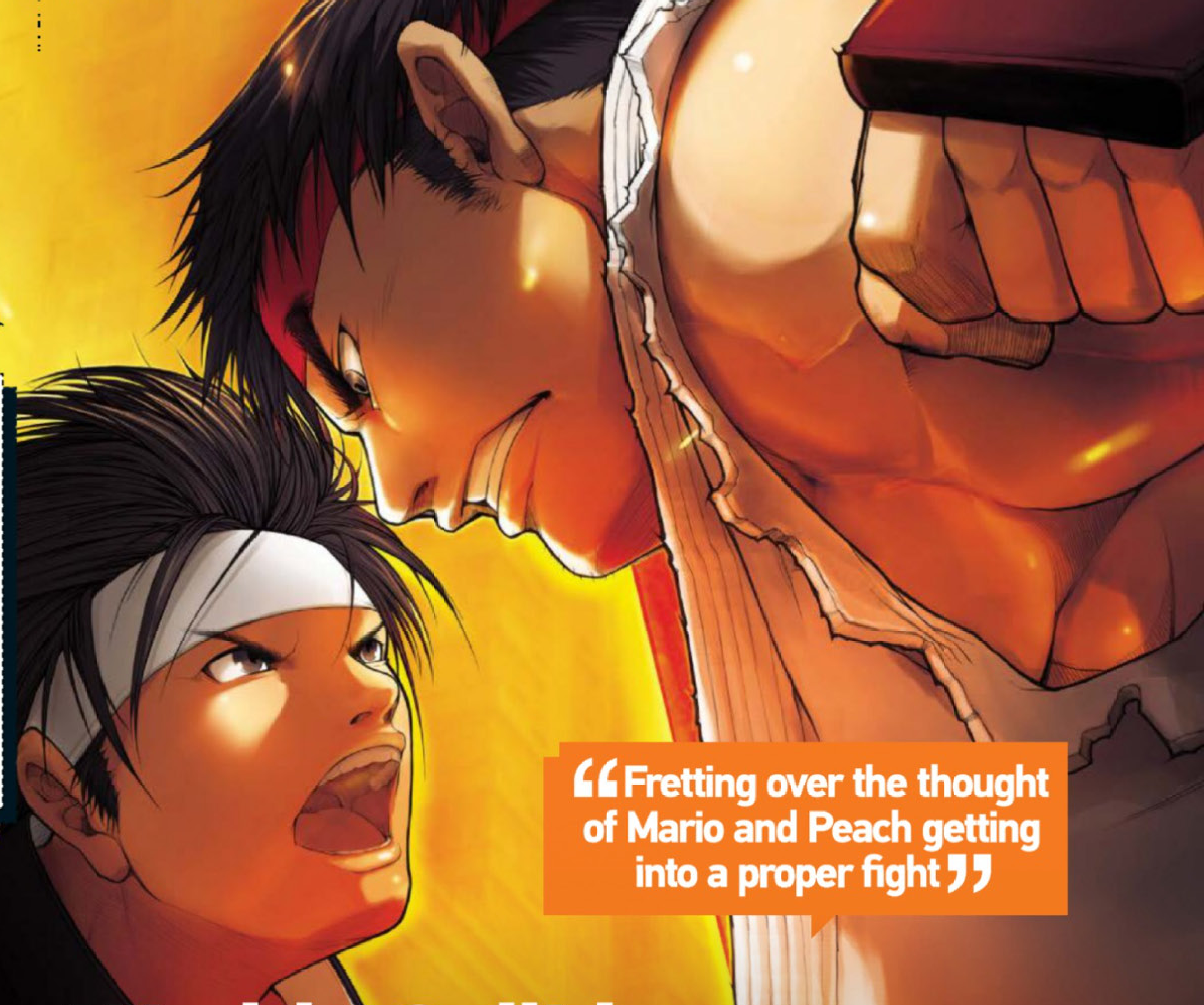
■ Okay so we've no idea what sort of update this classic LucasArts game is actually going to receive, but we're glad it's happening. The original adventure is arguably one of Tim Schafer's best, so it's pleasing to know he's going to be overseeing this shiny new HD update. Here's hoping that it receives a similar makeover to the *Monkey Island* games, allowing you to switch between both versions at will. More news as and when we get it.

Here's my bio…

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*, led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 20[illegible] and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



"Fretting over the thought of Mario and Peach getting into a proper fight"

When Worlds Collide

This month I'd like to tell you how I triumphed over *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games*. However, the dubious honour has little to do with waggling a magic Wii wand to the point of cardiac arrest.

See, nothing shakes me out of the spell cast by awesome videogames than to see my beloved heroes invade each other's out-of-this-world dimensions, or simply behaving out of character. Look, I was even uncomfortable at the prospect of *Super Mario Kart*, fretting over the thought of Mario and Princess Peach getting into a proper fight… and, in go karts? Wh…?

I should mention that this is the plight of somebody that assumed *Ms Pac-Man* took things a bit too far. Why? Because of weird broken mazes with dreaded twilight zones, and basically Pac-Man with lipstick and a ribbon. *Not sure if srs*. Hopefully you now appreciate how difficult it is for me to watch Link get his ass handed to him by Kirby in *Super Smash Bros*. Though, I guess it could happen.

Mash-ups are common these days of course. The success of *Super Mario Kart*, to the best of my hazy recollection, was how it all started. Sega (or rather Traveller's Tales) bundled the Sonic universe into a vehicular battleground, and Sony was very late to the party with *Crash Team Racing*. I stopped rolling my eyes around the time of *Muppet Race Mania*. Though, I have enjoyed watching most of the kart klones tumble off the edge of artificially elevated (ie crass marketing) cliffs.

Darran mentioned that Mev Dinc would be In The Chair this issue, and memories of *Street Racer* came flooding back. The thing about *Street Racer* was that it had bullet-proof gameplay. Yes, it took one of my most adored series – *Street Fighter* of course – and made a mockery of it, while taking a swipe at *Super Mario Kart* no less, which ought to have condemned it to hell. However, anyone that played *Street Racer* at the old EMAP Images gaming magazine HQ knew it was fun. Plus, as Darran pointed out in his Complete History of *Mario Kart*, there was a *Wacky Races* appeal to *Street Racer* too. In 1994, you understand, having fond memories of *Wacky Races* didn't make you (that) old.

Street Fighter meets *Super Mario Kart*, then. It more or less happened, lest we forget. Weirdly, it was good! I survived, but only just.

Having said all of that, the announcement of SNK Vs Capcom at the spring Tokyo Game Show in 1998 absolutely nailed me to the floor. To learn that this fabled clash of titans was finally happening was instantly awesome, earth shattering news. And all that there was on it, available on the show floor at any rate, was a simple white paper flyer with red and black writing to confirm its imminence TBC.

I'm not sure where I stand with regards to *Super Ultra Dead Rising 3 Arcade Remix Hyper Edition EX Plus Alpha* to be very honest. But I am grateful to know that a dash of Mev Dinc trademarked mischief always stands a chance of wrestling me out of my old-man comfort zones in the name of a whole lotta fun, pure and simple… ★


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A MOMENT WITH...

Bill Harbison

Every issue we speak to a classic developer. This month Bill Harbison tells us about his new solo project, Pocket Rocket

Who is Bill Harbison?

Bill Harbison has been working in the games industry since the early Eighties, and is particularly well known for his work at Ocean Software. He's now a freelance designer and *Pocket Rocket* represents the first game he's made entirely on his own.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Chase HQ* is arguably one of Bill's best early games.





» [ZX Spectrum] Bill was also involved in this classic movie licence from 1988.

Tell us a little bit about your new project *Pocket Rocket*.

Since before I got into the games industry I had always wanted to be able to make my own games. I'd always admired Jonathan Smith, as not only was he able to code a game, but also create great graphics and sound. I knew I'd never be able to program a game myself so it always remained a little pipe dream.

What's it like making games on your own?

About eight years ago I'd tried to create games with various pieces of software like Click And Play but never really managed to do much with them. All I'd manage to do was create a very basic platform game.

About two months ago my work colleague, Brandon Burrows, introduced me to Construct2. It seemed like quite a powerful and intuitive tool for creating games so I decided to set us both a challenge. We were to go off and try to create a version of *Flappy Bird*, then we would compare notes on how we'd done it and try and learn from each other.

After about two evenings' work I'd managed to create the engine for *Flappy Bird*, which made me realise how easy and lazy that game was. So I thought about how I could do something similar but with a twist that would be more playable and less punishing. From that, *Pocket Rocket* was conceived.

> **"For the first time I was in complete control of all creative decisions"**
> Bill Harbison



» [PC] Pressing the mouse button or touching the screen accelerates your ship. Dodge as many barriers as possible.

How does it compare to your time at Ocean?

The whole process was very liberating. For the first time I was in complete control of all creative decisions, from how fast the player travelled on the screen to the composition of the theme tune, how the graphics looked and how difficult it was to play. It was quite similar to the old days at Ocean, long before you had to write game design documents and target your software to a certain demographic. I just made it up as I went along and built the game the way I wanted it. It's never going to set the world on fire but it's my first ever complete game – I did it how I wanted and I'm happy with it. My next project will be much more ambitious but that will be after I manage to get *Pocket Rocket* on the iPhone.



» [PC] You can only have three collisions, meaning you'll eventually crash and burn.



» [PC] Bill has been involved in every aspect of *Pocket Rocket*, from coding to music.

What are the difficulties of making games for the mobile market?

The problem with the mobile market is it's difficult to make money from it, as most people want their games for free. They don't want to pay for them and they don't want to buy items contained in a free game. It seems sponsorship and adverts are the way to go for me. I may take a look at getting some in-game advertising and hopefully I'll make a bit of money to make up for the evenings I spent developing it, and give me the impetus to make something bigger.

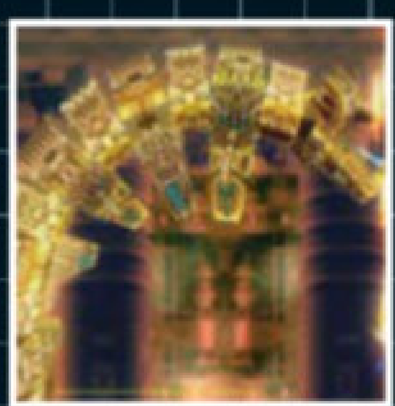
Would you be tempted to try and convert any of your older games to the mobile platform?

It would be quite funny to see a ZX Spectrum or Commodore 64 version of *Pocket Rocket* but I'd need to find a programmer to do that, and for free, so I guess it'll never happen. I could even ask Bob Wakelin to knock me up a cover for it. That would be interesting! *

19 July – 15 August

retrodiary

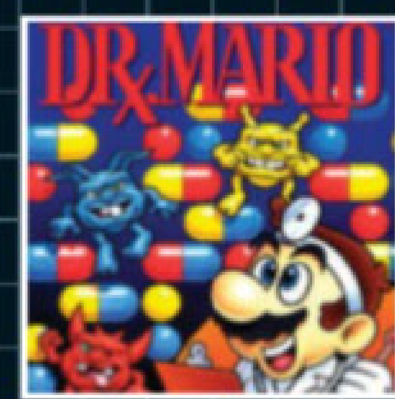
>> A month of retro events both past and present



23 July 1998
■ *Radiant Silvergun* blasts its way onto the Sega Saturn. Sadly it remained a Japanese only release.



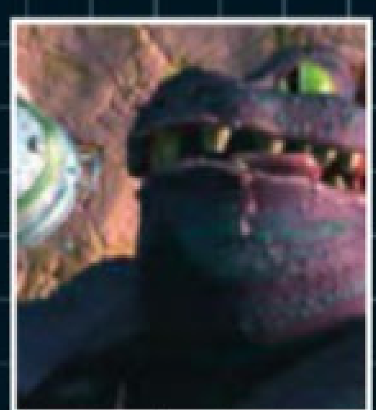
25 July 2003
■ *Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride* is released by THQ exclusively on the Game Boy Advance.



27 July 1990
■ Kill the viruses by joining up the tablets in *Dr Mario*, released by Nintendo on NES.

27 July 1999
■ Treasure Co releases *Stretch Panic*, an action-based platform game for the PlayStation 2.





31 July 1998
■ The platform game *Heart Of Darkness* is released by Ocean Software on the PlayStation.



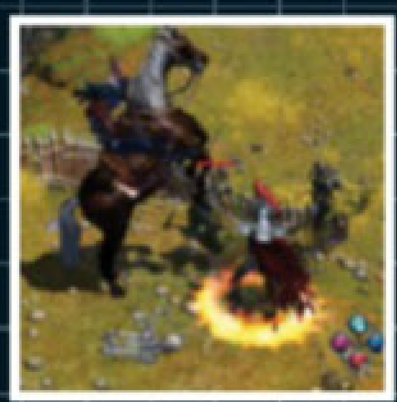
31 July 1997
■ Psygnosis releases its blindingly fast-paced futuristic racing game *WipEout 2097* on PC.



29 July 1983
■ The platform game *Elevator Action* arrives in arcades thanks to Taito.



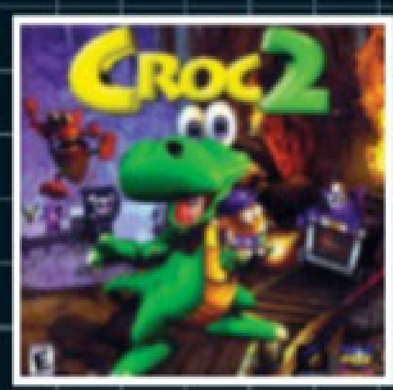
27 July 2010
■ *Need For Speed: World*, the massively multiplayer online racing game, is released by Electronic Arts on PC.



1 August 2014
■ *Sacred 3*, the action role-playing game, is expected to be released in Europe on PS3 and Xbox 360.



3 August 1977
■ Tandy's TRS-80 Model 1 home computer is released.



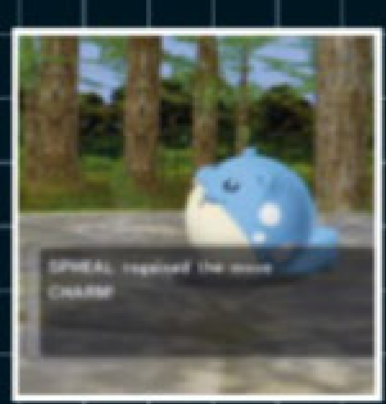
3 August 1999
■ Argonaut Software releases its cutesy platform game *Croc 2* on the PlayStation.



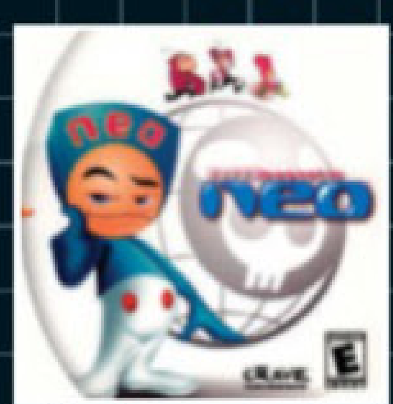
3 August 2000
■ Game Arts unveils its new role-playing game, *Grandia II*, on the Sega Dreamcast. Japan got it first, Europe six months later…



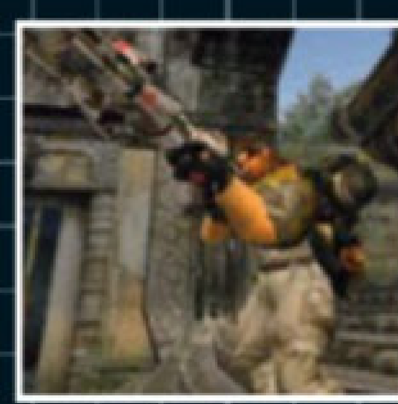
6 August 1993
■ Square releases its classic role-playing game *Secret Of Mana* on the Super Nintendo.



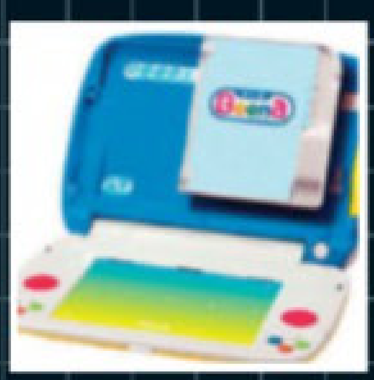
4 August 2005
■ Released initially in Japan, *Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness* appears exclusively on Nintendo's GameCube.



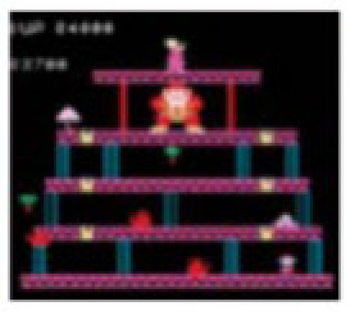
4 August 2000
■ 3D platform game, *Super Magnetic Geo*, is released on the Dreamcast in Europe.



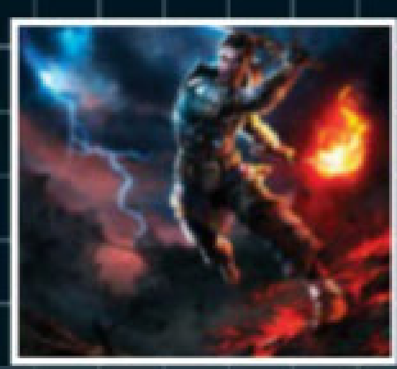
3 August 2001
■ Sega releases a conversion of its first-person shooter coin-op *Outrigger* on the Dreamcast.



6 August 2005
■ Sega's educational games console for young children, the Sega Beena, is released in Japan.



13 August 1982
■ The CBS ColecoVision is released with the excellent port of Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* as the pack-in game.



12 August 2014
■ *Risen 3: Titan Lords* is due for release in North America, with the European release coming three days later.



14 August 2014
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [VIC-20] HAL Laboratory was formed this month. Among their early output was *Jupiter Lander*.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1980

FEBRUARY 1980 – Sinclair's 1K powerhouse arrives, Lunar Rescue drops in, Namco guns for Navarone, Magical Spot not very magical while Alien Invaders give the Odyssey 2 a blast. Richard Burton inserts a RAM pack for extra grunt…



February saw home computing arrive for the masses at an affordable price in the form of Clive Sinclair's new micro, the ZX80. There had never been a home computer costing less than £100, if you disregard Sinclair's first computer, the hobbyist kit-form MK14 which launched in 1978.

The MK14 reportedly sold 50,000 units, which ultimately persuaded Sinclair that it should continue to develop home computers, and with that the ZX80 project began in May 1979. The ZX80 would be available in assembled and unassembled form with the latter costing £20 less, however you would have to be a bit tasty with a soldering iron to get it built.

The ZX80 ran on a Zilog Z80A processor, had 1K RAM, 4K ROM and a pressure sensitive keyboard that felt unresponsive and dead. The graphics were completely monochrome and there was so sound. Given that the design and costing was completely driven by the requirement of creating a sub-£100 computer, the ZX80 did the job intended without any luxury or frills.

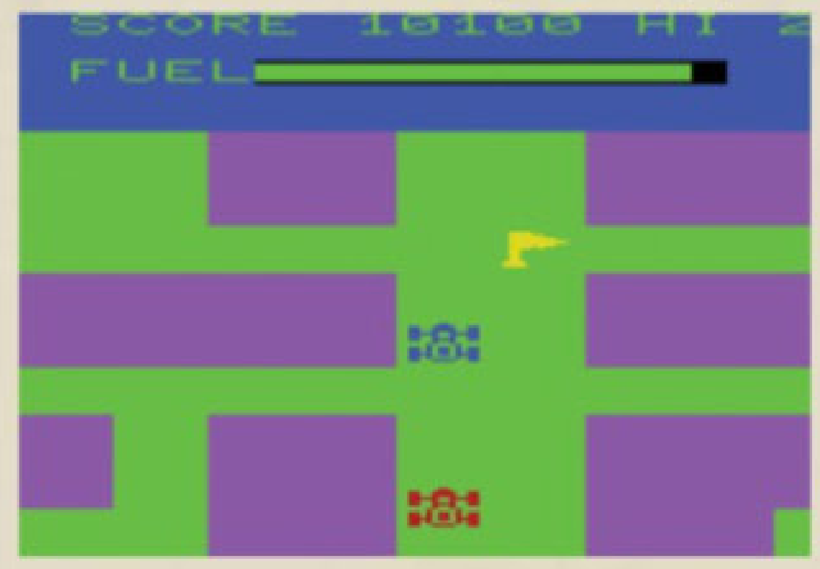
Although reliability became an issue, with overheating commonplace, the ZX80 was an instant hit. Within 18 months of its release it had racked up sales of over 100,000 units. The ZX80 ensured that Sinclair Research would continue to grow and develop new products but also taught and encouraged a whole generation to program, laying the foundation for a rich vein of coding talent in the UK.

One of Japan's most famous games developers, HAL Laboratory, was formed on 21 February. HAL Laboratory began developing titles for the Commodore VIC-20 including *Jupiter Lander* and the official arcade conversions of *Pac-Man* and *Rally-X*.

It later became a prominent MSX developer including the introduction of the long running *Eggerland* series of games, which it also converted and developed for the NES console. However, HAL Laboratory is probably most famous for creating the Kirby character in conjunction with Nintendo.

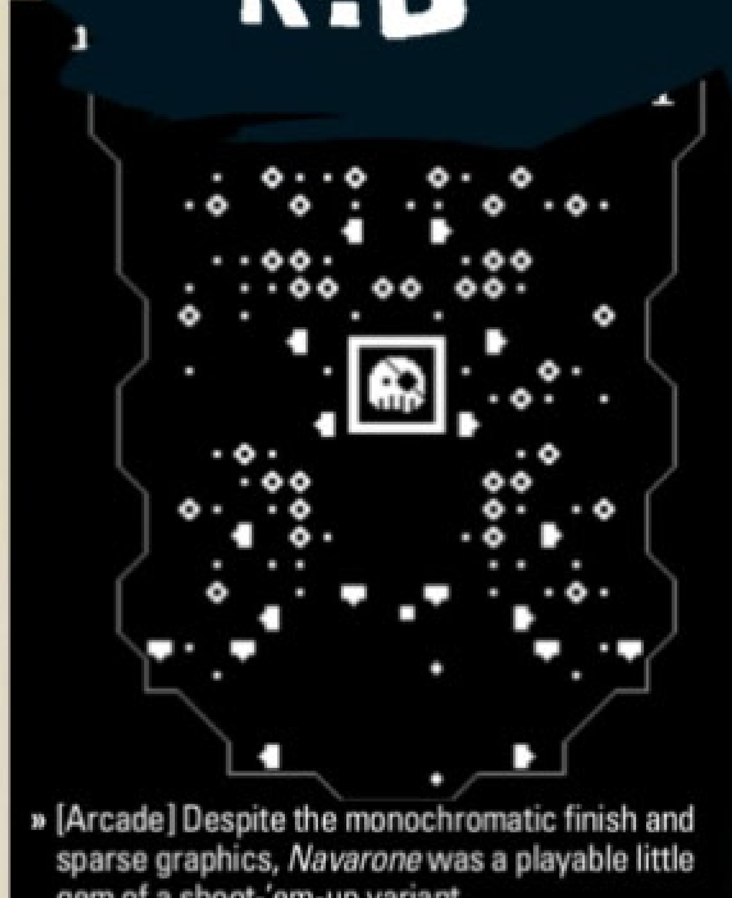
Having been released in Japan a few months earlier, *Lunar Rescue* by Taito arrived in the arcades of North America and Europe. *Lunar Rescue* was touted by Taito as being the follow-up game to *Space Invaders*.

» [VIC-20] HAL Laboratory also coded the impressive *Rally-X* port.



The aim of the game was to navigate through an asteroid field toward the bottom of the screen where three landing pads are situated. Along side the pads are six spacemen that had to be rescued one at a time. Once you successfully landed your module and had collected your spaceman, it was back to the top of the screen through the massed ranks of flying saucers to dock with the mothership. Failure to dock perfectly would see your rescued spaceman plummet to the surface and die.

As colourful and busy as *Lunar Rescue* was, it also generated very little interest from gamers. With the all-conquering *Asteroids* wiping the



» [Arcade] Despite the monochromatic finish and sparse graphics, *Navarone* was a playable little gem of a shoot-'em-up variant.



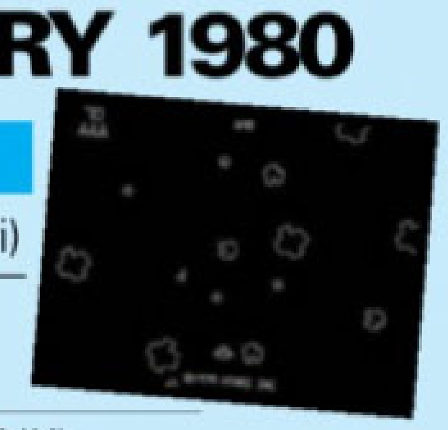
» Clive Sinclair launches the first sub £100 home computer, albeit lacking in colour, sound and RAM.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 1980

ARCADE

1 Asteroids (Atari)
2 Galaxian (Midway)
3 Ozma Wars (SNK)
4 Space Invaders Part II (Midway)
5 Lunar Lander (Atari)



THIS MONTH IN…

BYTE

News that Apple was almost ready to release its brand new Apple III home computer was rife. Indeed, it was duly released in May for the eye-wateringly steep sum of $7,800 and, unsurprisingly, it was a commercial failure. If you fancy playing around with an Apple III nowadays expect to fork out around £500.



COIN CONNECTION

Atari's *Asteroids* became its biggest ever hit with Atari producing more cabinets for it than any of its previous games. It was also noted that games were steadily increasing earnings for arcade operators to an extent that they were no longer considered second to pinball machines.



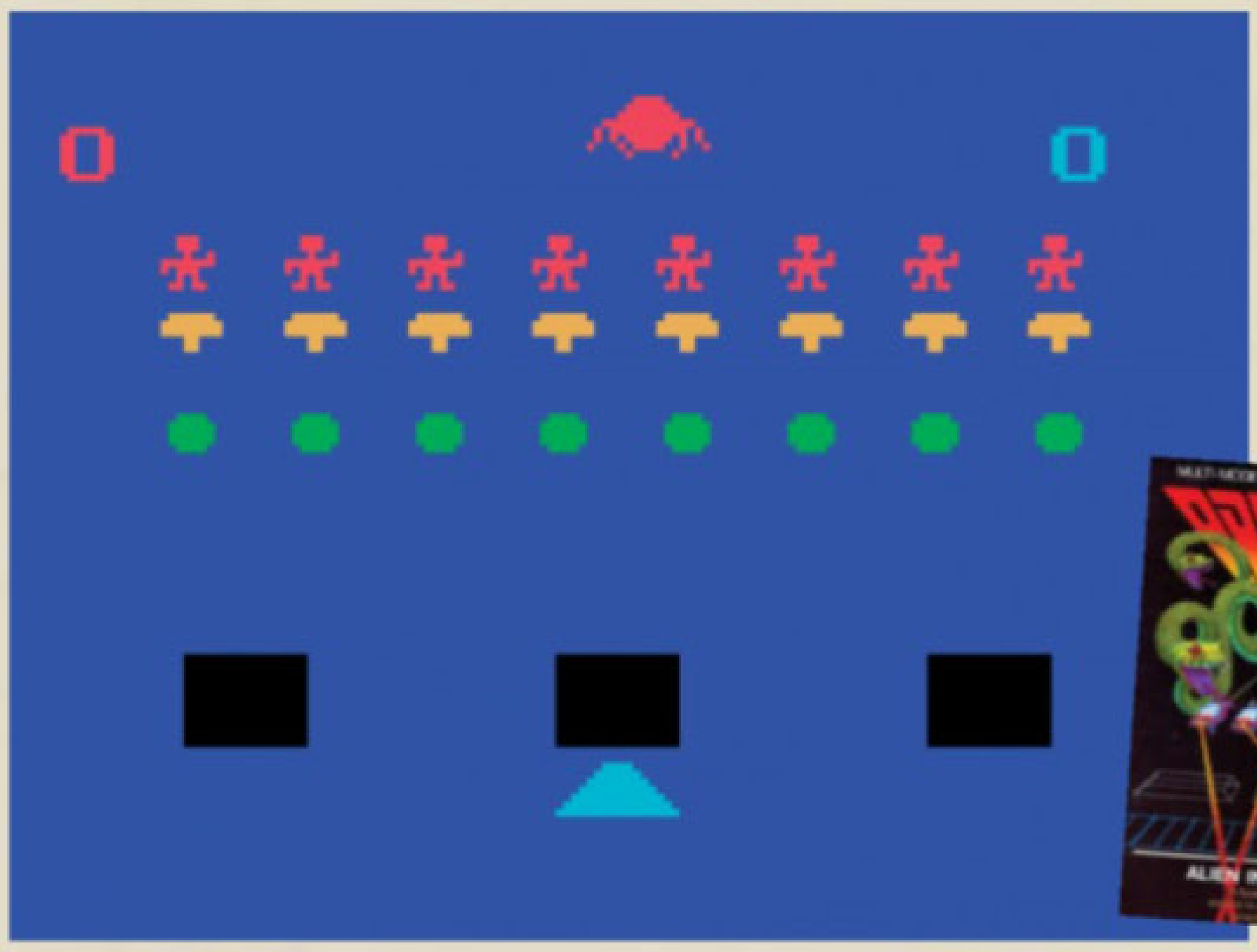
SOFTSIDE

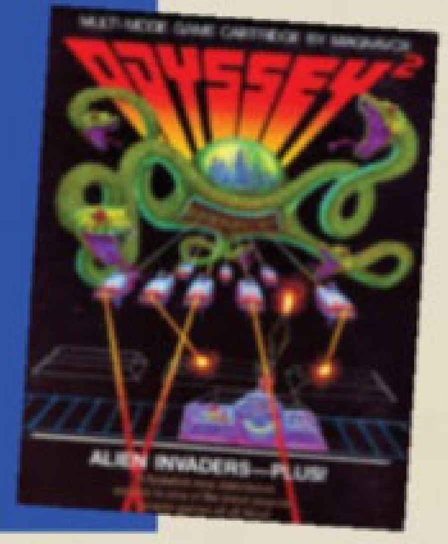
Among the type-ins featured in *SoftSide*, a Backgammon game stood out with its mammoth ten-page count. Interestingly it was a very early game submitted by games developer Scott Adams, founder of Adventure International. The listing included the date the program was completed and his home telephone number.





» [Arcade] *Lunar Rescue* was touted by Taito as a follow-up of sorts to *Space Invaders*.





» [Odyssey2/Videopac] *Alien Invaders – Plus!* incorporated a couple of original twists to the well worn *Space Invaders* formula.

floor with the competition, it suffered from a low take up of cabinets from arcade owners, cementing its place in the realms of coin-op anonymity.

Namco released the second title of three monochrome coin-op games it was unveiling in recent months. Unfortunately all would be released exclusively in Japan. The first game was *SOS*, a vertical aeroplane-dodging game, which came out in October 1979. The last would be *Kaitei Takara Sagashi*, a vertical fish-dodging game, out in May 1980. The middle offering was *Navarone* and proved to be the better of the three games.

Navarone found you circling an island strewn with obstacles, mines and the skull enemy situated at its centre. You had to clear the island while avoiding incoming bullets being shot from indestructible gun turrets. You could shoot the skull for bonus points but it was well protected by a shield. Once the island was completely clear you proceeded to the next island for more of the same. While gameplay was repetitive, the game was fun, although interrupted somewhat by the incessant *Pong*-like tinny sound effects that continually abused your eardrums throughout the levels.

Universal released *Magical Spot*, a fixed shooter that featured colourful sprites and a big enemy mothership. This ship dropped scorpion-like hatchlings that grew and crawled down the screen to attack you. It was standard shoot-'em-up stuff and was instantly forgettable. Universal later produced *Magical Spot II* in September 1980 that was virtually the same game except for a few superficial colour changes. It certainly couldn't have been for financial reasons as both games were resounding commercial flops.

Another blatant *Space Invaders* clone was ready for release, *Alien Invaders – Plus!*. It was developed by Magnavox for the console with umpteen names; whether it be Magnavox Odyssey 2, Videopac G7000 or Philips Odyssey, it was out for it and available now.

At first glance it looked liked *Space Invaders* clone fodder. However, on closer inspection *Alien Invaders – Plus!* did have elements of originality. Whenever your ship was hit, your ship would disappear, leaving your pilot stranded and vulnerable to attack. If he could get underneath one of the black shields safely, his ship would return.

The aliens weren't without shields themselves though. The bottom row of aliens were actually shields and couldn't be destroyed. This made for some tortuously slow progress as the aliens tended to line up neatly behind them. Graphically *Alien Invaders – Plus!* was nothing but functional but the game did have something about it that encouraged you to have one more go. *

FEBRUARY WORLD NEWS

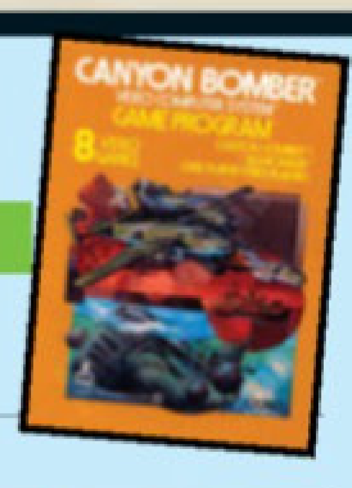
1 February saw the television game show *Play Your Cards Right* air for the first time. Hosted by Bruce Forsythe, couples would try to win a car by guessing answers to surveys of 100 people and would later guess whether their run of playing cards was higher or lower than the last.

7 February saw the world premiere of the controversial horror film *Cannibal Holocaust*. It told the story of a professor returning from a rescue mission in the Amazon rainforest to locate a group filming a documentary about cannibal tribes. He only finds their abandoned footage…

Cannibal Holocaust was one of the first examples of the found footage genre, later utilised in such films as *Cloverfield* and *The Blair Witch Project*. Controversially several real animal deaths were shown and the movie was banned in around 50 countries due to its graphic violence and gore.

13 February saw the death of television actor David Janssen. His most famous role was as Dr Richard Kimble in the Quinn Martin production *The Fugitive*, which ran from 1963-67. He died of a heart attack aged 48.

14 – 23 February saw the 13th Winter Olympics take place in Lake Placid, New York, USA. Great Britain's highlight of the Games was Robin Cousins winning a gold medal in the men's singles figure skating. In fact, that was GB's only medal…



ATARI 2600

1. Canyon Bomber (Atari)
2. Sky Diver (Atari)
3. Championship Soccer (Atari)
4. Superman (Atari)
5. Slot Machines (Atari)



TANDY TRS-80

1. Voodoo Castle (Adventure International)
2. Strange Odyssey (Adventure International)
3. Adventure (MicroSoft)
4. Galactic Trader (Software Exchange)
5. Lost Dutchman's Gold (The Programmer's Guild)

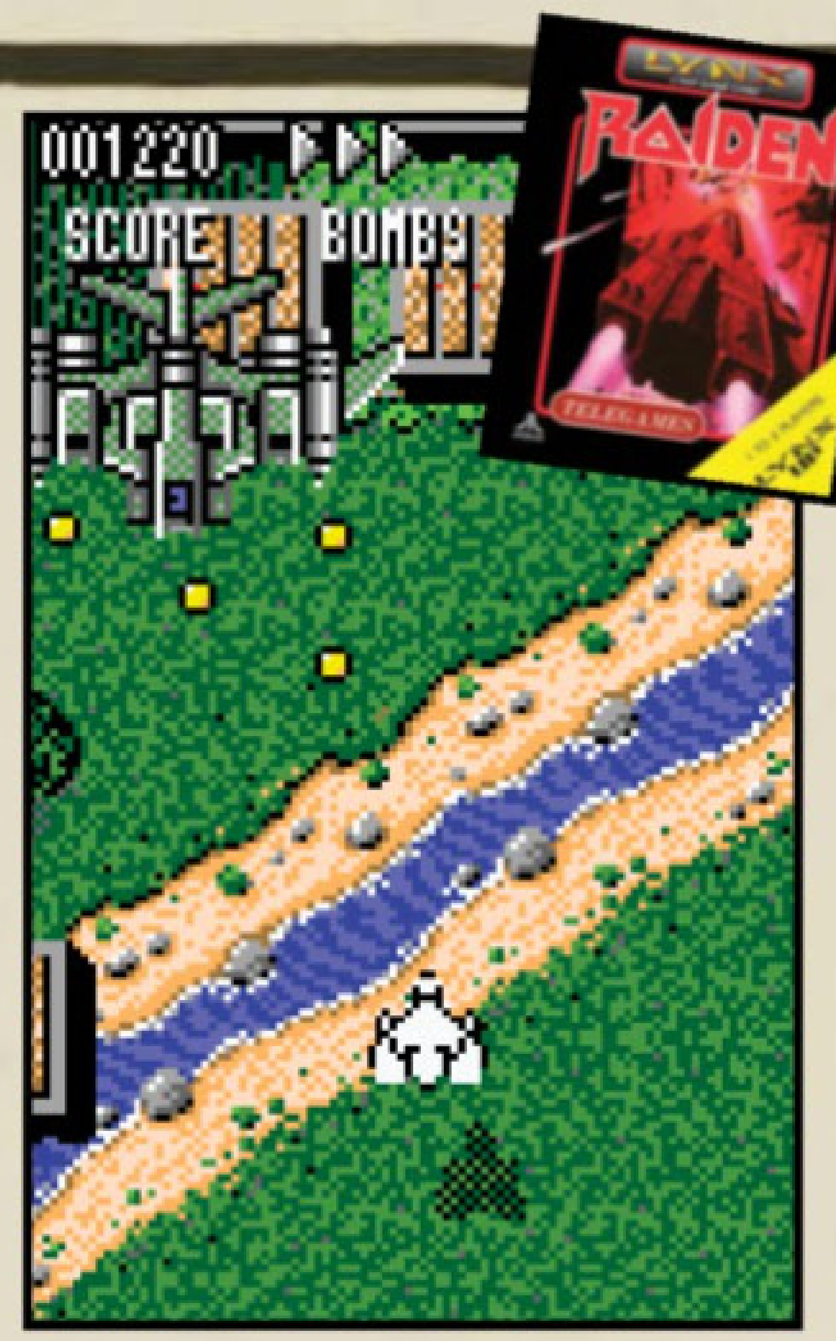


MUSIC

1. Coward Of The County (Kenny Rogers)
2. Too Much Too Young (Specials)
3. And The Beat Goes On (Whispers)
4. Atomic (Blondie)
5. I'm In The Mood For Dancing (The Nolans)

BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1997



» [Atari Lynx] *Raiden* was a superb shoot-'em-up which deserved to have been released before the Lynx was discontinued.

JUNE 1997 – Mario Kart 64 revs up, BC Story is prehistoric, Dungeon Keeper is a keeper, Sega compiles Sonic into Jam and the Jaguar and Lynx pounce on new Telegames releases. Richard Burton gets his red shell ready…



The belated arrival of *Mario Kart 64* in Europe on the Nintendo 64 this month had gamers, Nintendo fans and reviewers chomping at the bit. New features to the game included the beautifully rendered 3D graphics, a four-player battle mode and Mirror Mode, which could be unlocked by winning the Gold Cup on each of the 150cc levels. This inverted the tracks and, although familiar, they played like brand new courses. Needless to say, it was a ridiculously huge hit for Nintendo, shifting a reported 9 million copies worldwide since its launch.

New out in arcades this month was *BC Story*, a Stone Age sports simulation requiring button mashing and joystick waggling. Developed by South Korean company SemiCom, it had nothing to do with Sierra On-Line's *BC* games.

The mini-games were a strange collection of ten tasks including such oddities as blowing into the tail of a dinosaur, log chop and the egg stomp. The games were quirky but felt disconnected from each other and were either incredibly difficult or alarmingly easy with actual gameplay content thin on the ground. The most entertaining part of the game were the on-screen instructions, badly translated from Korean into English.

After several delays and postponed release dates, *Dungeon Keeper* for PC was finally here. Developed by Bullfrog Productions and released by Electronic Arts, *Dungeon Keeper* was due out over a year ago but Bullfrog's head honcho held it back as he wasn't happy with the finished article, requesting further improvements. By all accounts that's exactly what happened, as *Dungeon Keeper* turned out to be a superb game.

It was a dungeon building and God simulation rolled into one game that required creativity and strategy to play. Those elements came naturally with the user-friendly controls and endless gameplay possibilities. The game was played in an isometric perspective which could be rotated. For a monster's eye view of your dungeon you could take over any creature and view it from their perspective.

Building rooms and dungeon infrastructure, deploying monsters and keeping them happy, finding new spells; it's all in there and ensures that things don't get stale. Such is the depth and attention to detail; chances are you would never be bored with *Dungeon Keeper*.

There was *Sonic The Hedgehog* news for Sega Saturn owners and clarification of what the mysterious Project Sonic was actually going to be about. Long heralded but with little known, Project Sonic was revealed to be a two-phase development rather than the title of a single game.

Phase one would involve a Saturn compilation called *Sonic Jam*, which would see versions of the first three *Sonic The Hedgehog* 2D classics and *Sonic & Knuckles*. They would feature audio enhancements but the graphics would remain faithful to the Mega Drive originals. A nice touch was that the original lock-on cartridge feature of *Sonic & Knuckles* would be emulated so that you could link it to any of the other three games in the collection, opening up opportunities to play as Knuckles in *Sonic 2* and *3*.

Phase 2 of Project Sonic would be unveiled later in the year but would turn out to be the Sonic-themed *Mario Kart*-esque racing game *Sonic R*. It was a mixed bag, with its lovely 3D graphics, well designed tracks and a brilliant vocal soundtrack, but it was criticised for a decidedly ropey control system. *Sonic R* would appear just in time for Christmas.

Telegames, long time supporter of discontinued consoles, was releasing new software for the underrated and discontinued Atari Jaguar and Atari Lynx. First up for the Jaguar was *Zero 5*. It was a shoot-'em-up designed as a trio of missions; the first a standard blast-everything-that-moves level, the second a tunnel mission involving shooting and avoiding enemies and obstacles while the third involved yet



» [Atari Jaguar] *Zero 5* was a worthy addition to the Jaguar games catalogue thanks to Telegames and its support of discontinued consoles.



» [Nintendo 64] The undisputed king of karting games was back and was as good as ever.

CHARTS

JUNE 1997



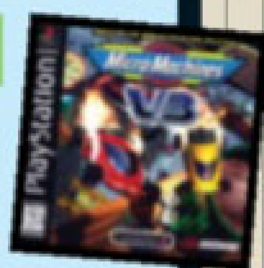
NINTENDO 64

1. Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)
2. Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire (LucasArts/Nintendo)
3. Pilotwings 64 (Nintendo)
4. FIFA Soccer 64 (Electronic Arts)
5. Turok: Dinosaur Hunter (Acclaim)



PC

1. Tomb Raider (Eidos)
2. Championship Manager 2: Double Pack (Eidos)
3. Command And Conquer: Red Alert (Virgin Games)
4. Magic: The Gathering (MicroProse)
5. Scourge Of Armagon (Activision)



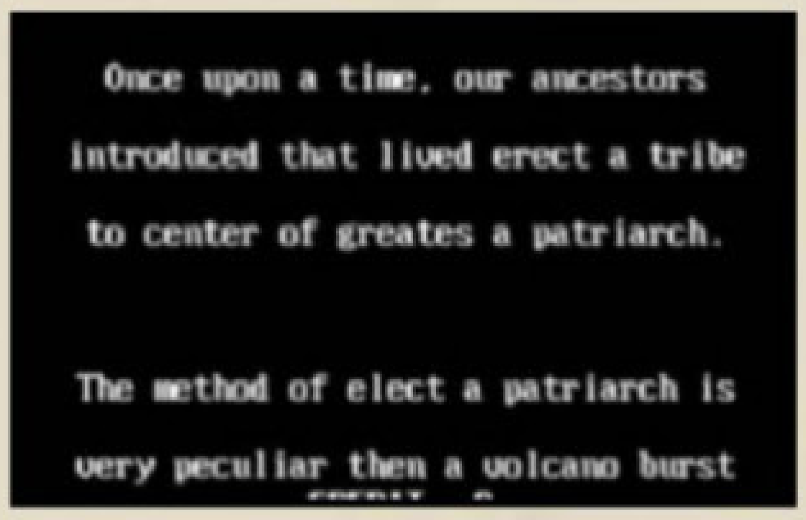
PLAYSTATION

1. Micro Machines V3 (Codemasters)
2. Ridge Racer: Platinum (Sony)
3. Destruction Derby: Platinum (Sony)
4. Tomb Raider (Eidos)
5. Tekken: Platinum (Sony)



MUSIC

1. Mmm Bop (Hanson)
2. I Wanna Be The Only One (Eternal Ft BeBe Winans)
3. I'll Be Missing You (Puff Daddy & Faith Evans)
4. Time To Say Goodbye (Sarah Brightman & Andrea Bocelli)
5. Free (Ultra Nate)





» [Arcade] The explanation at the beginning was almost more entertaining than the game itself.

THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES

C&VG highlighted a new craze sweeping Japan that would soon be unleashed in Europe, the cyber pocket pet world of Tamogotchi. The phenomenon had sold 3 million units since its launch in November. The UK would soon be able to feed virtual pets and scoop virtual poo too.



COMMODORE USER AMIGA

CU Amiga ran an interview with Peter Molyneux, touching upon *Populous*, Bullfrog and why the Amiga was his computer of choice. Peter stated, "to be totally honest one of the main reasons we worked on Amiga was because we were given several free machines by Commodore". Ah…



OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE

OSSM went mad at the previews of SNK's *Metal Slug*, mooted for a European release. It stated that "*Metal Slug* is programmed with conviction by a master team of coders who know what games are supposed to be about – fun". The game still didn't get a European release though…





» [Sega Saturn] *Sonic Jam* was a compilation of four of Sonic the Hedgehog's 2D Mega Drive outings. Great value and great fun.

more shooting in a 3D third-person perspective. While the superb polygon graphics were outstanding, the gameplay was a little flat. The tunnel level was particularly unforgiving with your ultra speedy vehicle attempting to negotiate around some absurdly narrow tunnels.

Next out was *Iron Soldier II* and *World Tour Racing* for Jaguar CD. *Iron Soldier II* was more of the same giant mechanical robot blasting fun with enhanced graphics and soundtrack. With a mission-based storyline, of which there were now 20 to tackle, it was markedly harder than the original game. It was a good, solid game with no airs or graces, just fun-filled weaponised mayhem.

World Tour Racing was an F1-styled arcade racer that tried to better *Chequered Flag*. Graphically it was okay with some nice FMV inserts but the gameplay suffered from frame rate problems and the collision detection was not as convincing as it should have been. Not bad but not great either.

The Atari Lynx also had two new games with *Fat Bobby* and *Raiden*. *Fat Bobby* was a well-crafted

» [PC] Build a dungeon, populate it and keep the dungeon dwellers happy. Easier said than done but it was excellent fun trying.





platform game with polished graphics and animation with music that complemented the rock band theme nicely. The unflattering title hid a surprisingly decent Lynx game that's well worth seeking it.

Lastly there was *Raiden*, a conversion of Seibu Kaihatsu's classic scrolling vertical arcade shooter. What was nice is that it had also been designed to be played vertically on the Lynx. It felt awkward at first but made perfect sense when you got used to it. It's a solid conversion that's only really let down by a complete lack of music. *Raiden* on the Lynx is a very accomplished piece of programming, it's just a shame that a game of this calibre didn't arrive during the Lynx's commercial lifetime. *

JUNE WORLD NEWS

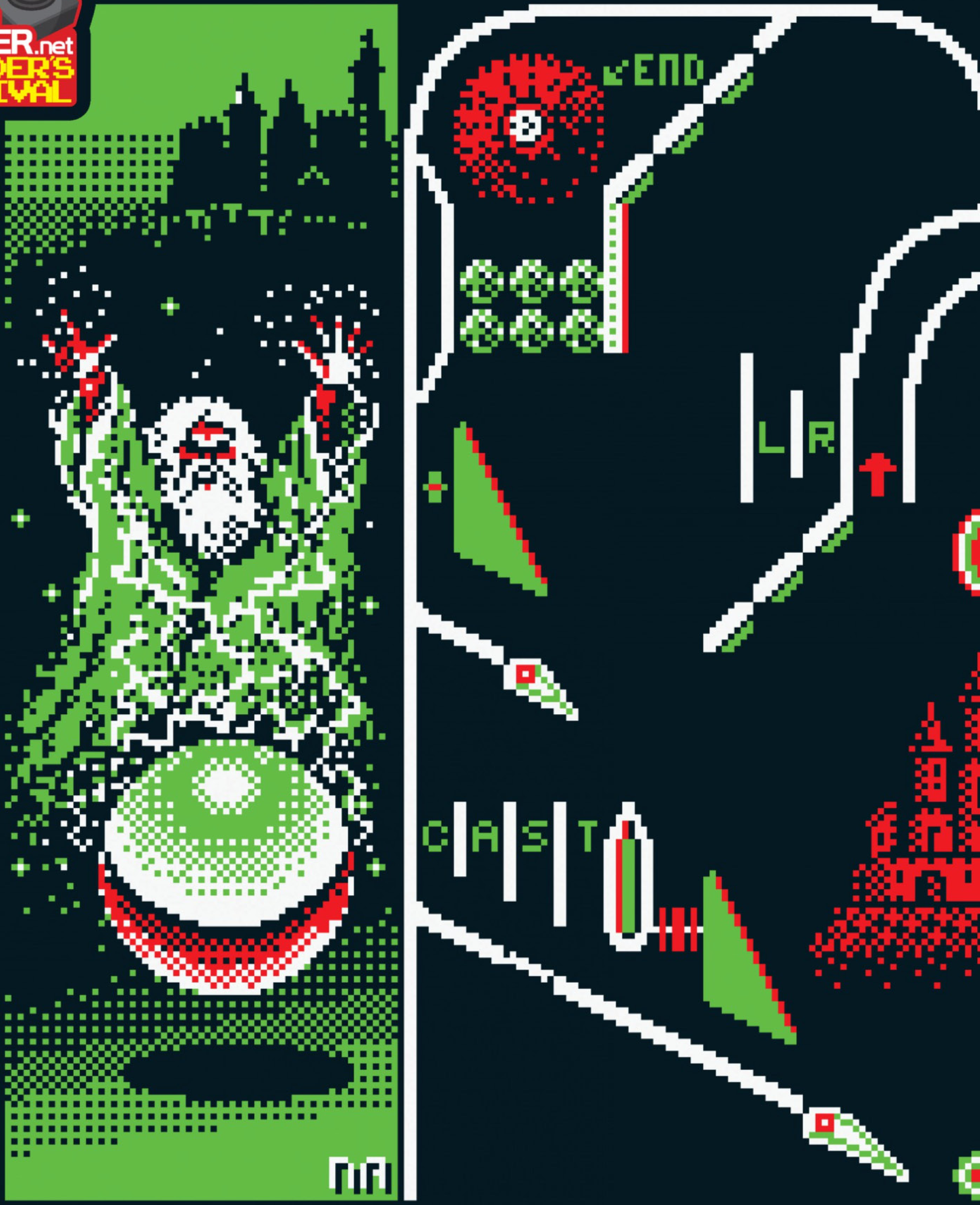
12 June saw the superhero movie *Batman & Robin* hit the silver screen, although it would've been just as at home hitting the fan. With a cast of George Clooney as Batman, Chris O'Donnell as Robin, Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr Freeze, Uma Thurman as Poison Ivy and Alicia Silverstone as Batgirl, surely it would be a sure-fire box office smash? One bone of contention: why did Clooney's Batman suit have nipples?

13 June also saw another movie of turd-like proportions released with *Speed 2: Cruise Control*. A cruise liner speeds on a collision course toward an oil tanker thanks to a hacker. Sandra Bullock stars in the sequel. Sadly it was more car crash viewing than boating accident…

22 June saw the death of English actor Don Henderson. He starred in a variety of roles but is best remembered for playing DS George Bulman in *The XYY Man*. He also featured in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, *Red Dwarf* and *Doctor Who*, ensuring lots of work on the sci-fi convention circuit. He died aged 65 of throat cancer.

25 June also saw the death of French explorer, filmmaker and author Jacques Yves Cousteau. He died of a heart attack aged 87.

26 June saw Bloomsbury Press publish a new book about a boy attending a school for wizards in *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*. Written by J K Rowling, it went on to do rather well…


END
L R
C A S T



Advanced Pinball Simulator

PINBALL, WITH ADDED WIZARD

#77

» THE OLIVER TWINS » AMSTRAD CPC » 1984

What was it with Codemasters and its predilection for the 'simulator' suffix? Still, back in the day (as we retrobates often like to say) it was more than enough to part me from my three-quid pocket money.

What we have here is a rather strange little title. As if trying to convert pinball to a home computer wasn't strange enough, *Advanced Pinball Simulator* is a pinball game with a plot! Yes, there's the usual scoring system and all the other trappings of pinball, but the whole experience hinges on a life and death scenario. Something about an evil wizard, a castle and a volcano about to erupt.

It's not really important. All you need to know is that hitting certain bumpers will destroy the castle bit-by-bit, or collecting flashing letters will fill a potion bottle to thwart the wizard with. As mad as it seems, it actually made the game eminently more playable, something more to aim for than the usual high-score malarkey and so justified its transition from arcade to bedroom.

However, there's only one table, and it is pretty unforgiving. Despite hours of play I never completed it and having a quick replay now, it doesn't seem any easier. Every time you think you're getting close, a new obstacle seems to appear. It's also not the smoothest game of its type to ever grace a home computer, with the ball movement occasionally following its own laws of physics. But heck, it's a nifty enough little game, with a snazzy theme tune that, even now, could while away an hour or two.

DARREN CARLE





Smashing buildings, crushing vehicles and eating people are activities generally reserved for gaming's antagonists, but Rampage's mutated monsters never cared much for the rules. Nick Thorpe takes a look back at the series that let you be the bad guy…

Boom! You feel your home violently shaking, the intermittent pattern of intensity telling you that this is no earthquake. Crash! A humongous, hairy hand breaks through the outside wall of your house and takes hold of you. Whoosh! The sound of air rushing past your head is the last thing you hear as you're tossed up toward the sky, only for the inevitable force of gravity to take hold and plummet you into the mouth of an impossibly enormous wolf.

It's a pretty grim end, and one of the many seen in *Rampage*. Cars are flung into billboards, people are kicked across the screen like screaming footballs, and heavily populated buildings are reduced to rubble. This is destruction on a massive scale, with body counts to rival anything that Hollywood puts out – and it's all your doing. Rather than bringing down the gigantic monsters, your job is to take control of them. If ever you watched *King Kong* and felt bad for the big beast, *Rampage* represents your chance to take revenge. ▶



» [Arcade] George, Ralph and Lizzie have the freedom to attack while they're climbing – George has taken out a chopper here.

It's a theme that has enormous cultural resonance thanks to the popularity of giant monster movies, which makes it somewhat surprising that the idea to exploit the theme only came about due to technological factors. "*Rampage* was the result of my unwillingness to take 'not possible' for an answer," explains Brian Colin, then an artist at Midway. "Our system's foreground resolution was higher than any of our arcade competitors, and our foreground sprites could move freely around the screen. But our low-resolution background images were never designed to do anything but provide a single static title page."

"During a post Trade Show discussion with some of the hardware guys, I was told that, unlike some other games of the period, animated backgrounds were not possible with our current hardware. So while discussing the limitations of the current game hardware with some co-workers, it occurred to me that our hardware's annoying rectangular block movement constraints were ideally suited for only one thing: a building collapsing upon itself. It was only a small step from buildings falling down to players smashing buildings, to giant monsters laying waste to entire cities… which was enough to convince me that we had a potential blockbuster on our hands."

The power of this premise is well-known today, but it's fair to say that not everybody was as enthusiastic as Brian when the game was pitched. "Middle management was skeptical about doing a game in which the player was the bad guy, and shot the game down for being too unusual," he recalls. "Again, unwilling to take 'no' for an answer, I went directly to the office of the new president of Bally/Midway (Maury Ferchen) who, needless to say, loved the unique concept. The green light was given, and the game went on to break all previous arcade earnings records."

The premise of *Rampage* was delightfully simple. Taking control of George, Lizzie or Ralph (respectively a gorilla, a lizard and a wolf), up to three players were tasked with punching buildings, eating bystanders and crushing the puny tanks and helicopters sent out in the vain hope of halting your destruction. Each stage, represented as a 'day' in the monsters' long campaign of destruction, required all of the buildings on the screen to be demolished.

The game's multiplayer aspect proved to be the hardest part to get right. "Because people found themselves playing with total strangers who could join in at any time, it became evident early on that there should be no 'wrong way' to play this game. The biggest challenge from a gameplay standpoint was making sure that the game felt like a 'free-for-all'," recalls Brian. "Part of the joy of being a giant monster is that there are no rules that apply to you." To properly convey this sense of chaos, players were allowed to attack one another

CONVERTING THE CARNAGE

Kenneth Hurley explains how he brought Rampage to home formats



How much access did you have to the original game?
I was able to get the all the source code for the original game, which was written in 100 per cent assembly language. Luckily I knew 6502 and 68000 at the time, so I could easily read the Z80 code. In general the only thing that was useful from the code was the trajectory code for the thrown dynamite and the level layouts.

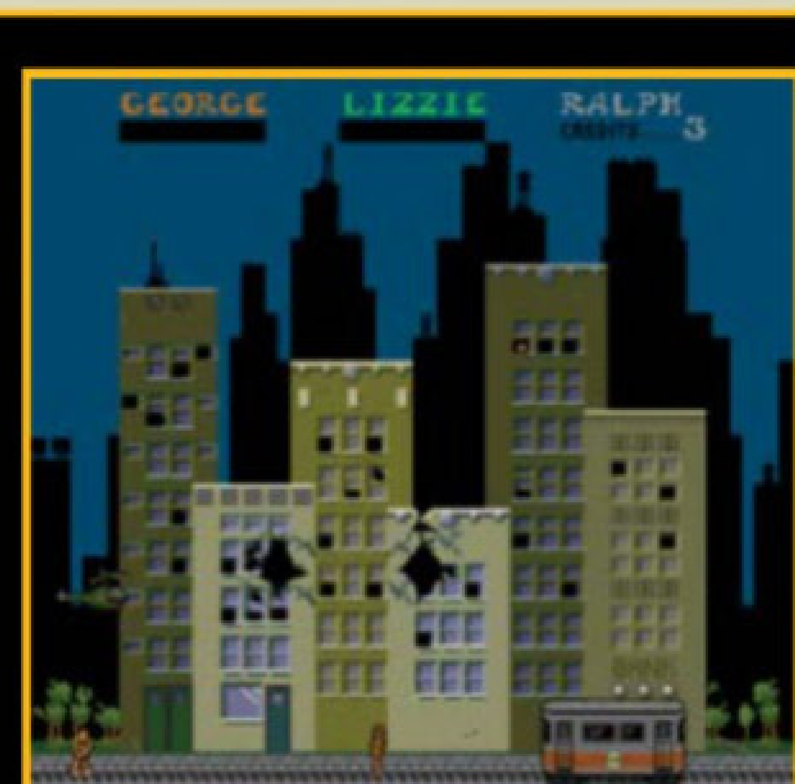
How much of a challenge was the Apple II version?
The Apple II version was quite the challenge but only because of trying to make it fast enough to run on it. In the end I wasn't completely satisfied by the frame rate, but Activision said it was good enough to ship and the business decision was made to ship it. It took me about two weeks to hand-translate all the source code from 8086 to 6510 for the Apple II. The total time was about three weeks to port my 8086 PC game to the Apple II.

What benefits did the PC and Amiga offer you?
The PC was the biggest challenge, as I had to write audio systems, keyboard, and several graphics drawing systems. Back in those days, you had to write 2D blit routines for CGA, TGA, EGA and VGA. I learned my lesson from hand-porting the Apple II game and with a friends help learned about Lex and Yacc which were tools to build compilers. They can also build translators, so we built an 8086 to 68000 translator in about two weeks and 90 per cent of the code was done. I then built the graphics functions and audio functions. The Amiga was sort of a hassle because of the Intuition operating system. I decided to throw it out and go directly to hardware, since Intuition was unbearably big and unwieldy to use.

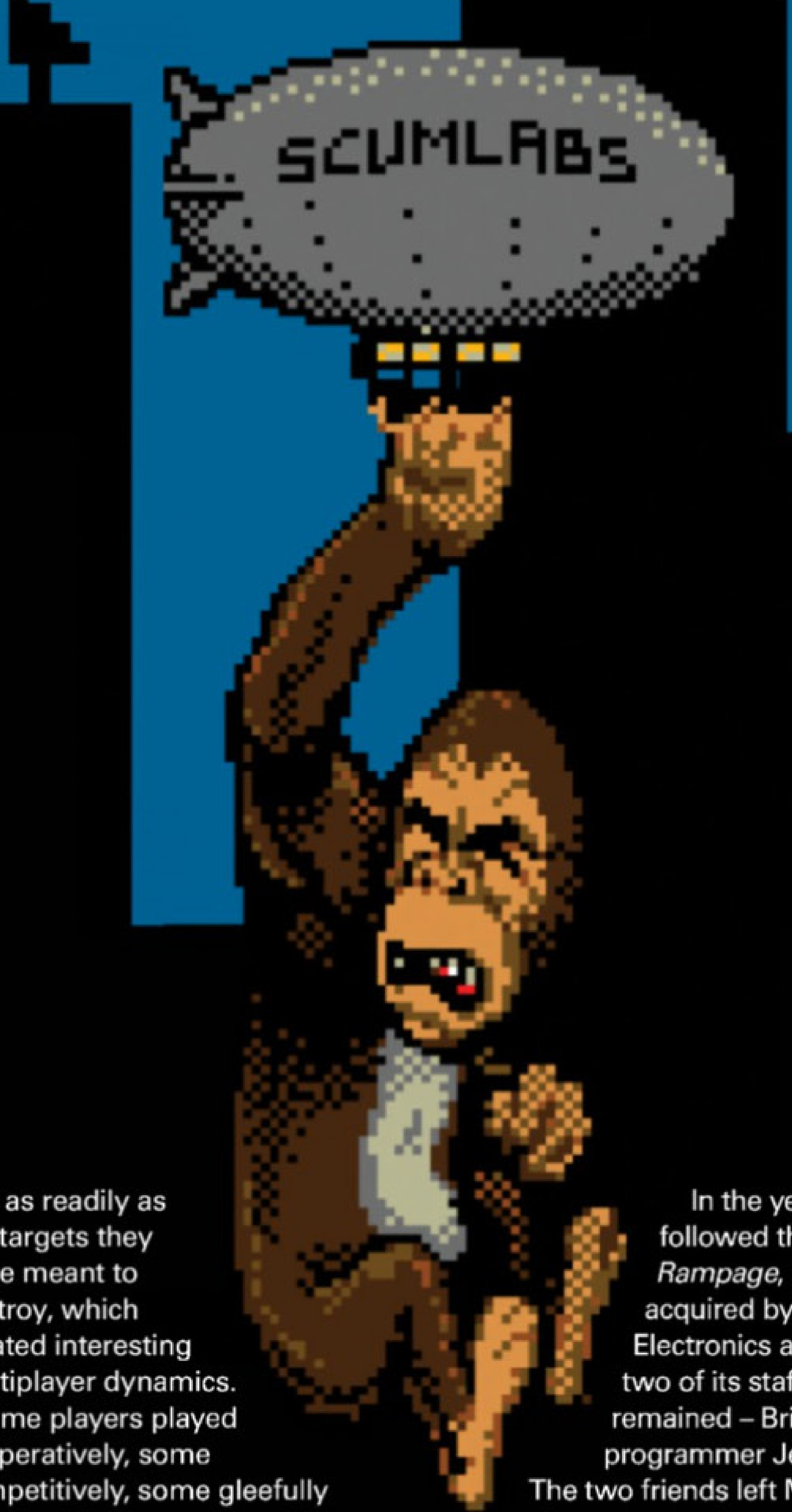
Is it true your source code was used for the Master System version? How did you feel about that?
Yes, I think it was. I think that is great! I recently went back to look at some of my old assembler code and was amazed how clean and object oriented it is. I also used to comment on every single line in assembly language. I'm sure the Master System programmers were very appreciative of that.



» [Arcade] News updates between stages would occasionally provide hints for observant players.



» [Arcade] The monsters revert to human form when defeated. In multiplayer, you can eat your friends!



just as readily as the targets they were meant to destroy, which created interesting multiplayer dynamics. "Some players played cooperatively, some competitively, some gleefully switched from one gameplay style to the other depending on the situation."

There was more going on in the game, too. Civilian vehicles never needed to be crushed – but you could certainly do it. The train in particular was a favourite, as players could play train tennis, kicking it back and forth between each other. "The chaos worked in our favour, from a gameplay standpoint," explains Brian. "We didn't have to unleash a frustrating, impossible-to-beat super boss on the players… the tiny little bullets and the player's own clumsy mistakes would eventually bring them down."

Rampage was a major success upon its release in 1986, to the point that one arcade in which the game was tested actually asked for it to be removed due to the enormous crowds surrounding it. The game was widely converted, receiving versions for a range of systems from the ageing Atari 2600 through to the 16-bit computers. Our picks of the ports include the ZX Spectrum, Lynx, Master System and Amiga versions. With such success you'd image that a sequel was inevitable, but while *Rampage* did eventually receive one, it took a rather long time for it to arrive.

In the years that followed the release of *Rampage*, Midway was acquired by Williams Electronics and only two of its staff members remained – Brian and programmer Jeff Nauman. The two friends left Midway after a few years and formed Game Refuge, developing games such as *General Chaos*, but never broke contact with their former employer. *Rampage World Tour* was born during a visit to Midway's offices, as Brian explains: "one of the senior executives began complaining that they had no games that appealed to a 'broader demographic'. They had the adolescent male covered, he said, but what they needed was 'something that appealed to everyone else…'" The answer was obvious to Brian and Jeff – a new *Rampage* was needed. For the rest of us, it might need a little more explanation.

"*Rampage* had a much broader demographic appeal than other games of the day," Brian tells us. "The cartoon violence and tongue-in-cheek humour gave it a universal appeal. Little kids could play alongside teenagers, adults could play with their kids, and even (gasp) girls could and would jump on and pummel their annoying brothers and boyfriends." Preserving that sense of humour was key, which resulted in the cartoonish characters with a claymation-esque appearance.

This time around, the wrecking crew took their destructive exploits worldwide to smash the bases of Scumlabs, the antagonists from the original game, whose plot was expanded in the sequel.



» [Arcade] The carnage is turned up to 11 in *Rampage World Tour* – George is bouncing on a building here.

> **"The cartoon violence and tongue-in-cheek humour gave it a universal appeal"**
> Brian Colin



» [Arcade] The new graphical technology enables funnier animation sequences, such as the new toss-up eating move.



International travel was achieved either by finding flags or smashing tourism billboards, and resulted in a mini-game in which the crew jumped on a plane and collected mid-air items. There were other enhancements, too: monsters were now able to kick buildings, taking out whole floors at once, and could bounce on girders in certain half-wrecked buildings. The ability to punch the top of a building also proved useful, especially as the new scrolling level format allowed for more buildings in a single stage.

But the most surprising new addition to the gameplay was VERN (short for Violently Enraged Radioactive Nemesis). VERN was a flying, highly powerful secondary mutation of any of the three main characters, a desirable power-up who had his origins in one of the game's scrapped features. "Initially, Midway executives wanted to make *Rampage World Tour* a four-player game, so a fourth player character was called for," recalls Brian. "However, a few months into development, they decided that they didn't want to stray from the original three-player cabinet footprint, and asked us to drop the fourth monster. So we decided to turn VERN into a mutation of a mutation, so to speak."



» [PlayStation] Ruby is one of *Rampage Universal Tour*'s new characters, and has appeared in every game since.



» [PlayStation] The destruction of Pyongyang usually proves to be a sensitive matter…

Rampage World Tour's successful arcade release in 1997 ensured that it received conversions to all the major formats of the day. The PlayStation, Saturn, N64 and PC all received conversions which were close to the arcade original, while the Game Boy received a basic conversion which boasted enhanced visuals on the new Game Boy Color. The project was a financial success for Midway and a sequel was on the cards, but Game Refuge's vision of a 3D *Rampage* was a more ambitious project than the publisher was willing to consider. Rather than work on a substantially similar game, Game Refuge left Midway to get on with it itself, with the development duties for the eventual console-only sequel falling to Avalanche Software.

Rampage Universal Tour introduced fans to a brand new cast of characters. Boris, Curtis and Ruby (respectively a rhinoceros, a mouse and a lobster) had to venture across the world to free the original trio, as they had been locked away in thematically appropriate locations. Once they'd been freed, aliens invaded Earth and it was up to the team to stop them. When they reached Area 51, they discovered and rescued a new monster, the alien cyclops Myukus, before taking their rampage into space and finally to the home planet of the aliens.

In design terms, *Universal Tour* was not a major departure from the template established by *World Tour*. The main addition to the game was the inclusion of a special move for each character, which could significantly speed up the process of destruction. Special moves could only be performed after eating enough people to fill the newly-included special meter, encouraging the monsters to take more regular snacks during gameplay. The other addition was new mini-games to break up the various stages, ranging from timed demolitions to people-punting contests.

However, the actual demolition, which still made up the bulk of the gameplay, was barely advanced from *Rampage World Tour*. Although the PlayStation version allowed for multitap support, bringing it up to parity with the N64's three-player action, the general lack of improvements resulted in a poor critical reception for both versions of the game upon its launch in 1999. The Game Boy Color version, meanwhile, was an improvement over its predecessor, with better visuals and gameplay that was closer to the full-size console versions. Sales remained strong, prompting Midway to press ahead with the series.

Again developed by Avalanche Software, *Rampage Through Time* was a PlayStation exclusive which represented the culmination of the trilogy that began with *World Tour*. Having smashed every building on Earth and then spread the destruction across the entire known universe, there was only one frontier left for our daring demolitionists: time. Having failed to deal with the mutants in the present, Scumlabs invents a time machine to undo the accidents that resulted in their creation. Unfortunately for the careless chemical company our protagonists find and enter the



» [PlayStation] Boris is our favourite of the new breed, due to his excellent charging special attack.

MONSTERS AT LARGE!

GEORGE, LIZZIE AND RALPH WEREN'T THE ONLY MONSTERS TO GO ON A RAMPAGE…

R - RAMPAGE WT - RAMPAGE WORLD TOUR UT - RAMPAGE 2: UNIVERSAL TOUR TT - RAMPAGE THROUGH TIME TD - RAMPAGE: TOTAL DESTRUCTION



LITTLE MONSTERS

We talk to Cathryn Mataga about cramming Rampage Universal Tour onto handheld hardware



How did you come to work on *Rampage Universal Tour*?

I was looking for programming work, and a headhunter suggested Digital Eclipse. This headhunter told me they had worked on all kinds of old games, and back in those days I was already a game business old timer. Really, I think the headhunter was slightly confused, because Digital Eclipse had developed emulator packs for some old games, but wasn't the original developer of anything classic era.

We spent quite a bit of time on the phone trying to get the contract for this game going. During this time I put together *Shamus* for the Game Boy Color, and I wonder now, maybe getting this working convinced them I could pull off *Rampage Universal Tour*. I had programmed quite a bit of 6502 assembly language at this time, but that was my first game that was Z80 assembly.

DE was just a few miles away so even though I programmed this game at home, I could drive over there and talk to artists in a few minutes. I never had a Game Boy Color development system, but coded the entire game using hardware I bought from a company in Hong Kong.

Did you have any involvement with the developers who worked on the home console versions of the game?

I had a copy of the PlayStation version of *Rampage Universal Tour*, and I used this as a guide for how the Game Boy Color version should play.

What were the biggest problems from a technical point of view that you faced getting *Universal Tour* to run on a Game Boy Color?

This cart supported link cable, and link cable on the Game Boy Color was always a challenge. Not so much the programming of it, but fixing the bugs and testing was always so time consuming. Nintendo always extensively tested any link cable game, so if the game locked up or went out of sync, they would not approve it.

How do you feel the GBC version compares to the home outings?

It's way more limited, but considering the limitations of the hardware and the time we had to create this, I think it's a decent port. I think the link support is something that the publisher really wanted, and I feel good we were able to pull this off. The basic feel of the game is still there.

machine, thereby putting every building ever erected at risk of a right good punching.

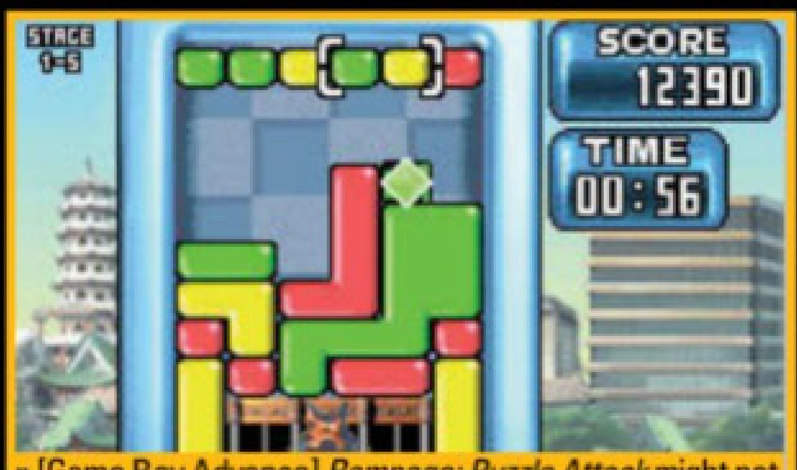
The core gameplay deviates little from the previous two games in the series, with the same array of attacks available. Harley, a warthog monster, joins the cast alongside the original trio, the *Universal Tour* trio and Myukus. A large cast had become something of a necessity too, as *Rampage Through Time* ensured that three monsters took to every stage, with CPU-controlled players filling in empty slots. To break up the action, Avalanche included a selection of mini-games played at the end of each time period, including some excellent riffs on classic arcade games such as *Asteroids* and *Warlords*.



» [PlayStation] This *Asteroids* game is one of the many mini-games included in *Rampage Through Time*.



» [PlayStation] The medieval period replaces the likes of helicopters and tanks with dragons and knights.



» [Game Boy Advance] *Rampage: Puzzle Attack* might not be the most natural fit for the series, but it's great.

Unfortunately, not all was right with *Rampage Through Time*. The forced three-player action was a burden when the CPU got involved – the screen will only scroll when it's able to show all three players at once, but the AI doesn't always naturally move on in the way a real player would. Worse yet, it can be quite content to simply constantly attack you. The mini-games aren't simply a fun diversion either – failing to beat the CPU in these challenges causes an instant game over, meaning that they become must-wins. Combined with the repetition inherent to the *Rampage* template, these issues caused another negative reception. *Rampage Through Time* would be the last traditional *Rampage* game for a number of years, but it wasn't long before a spin-off arrived.

Late in 2001, our mutated beasts took an unusual diversion into the puzzle genre, courtesy of Finnish developer Ninai Games. *Rampage Puzzle Attack* is a Game Boy Advance game that plays almost identically to the developer's PC series *Drop Mania*. The top of the screen is lined with blocks, which can be switched around *Yoshi's Cookie*-style and dropped in pairs. Clusters of blocks can be cleared with clearing blocks of the same colour, much like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*.

A variety of play modes were on offer including standard marathon and preset puzzle modes, but the true *Rampage* feel came to the fore when liberating your fellow mutants in Rescue Mode. A cage containing one of the monsters is located at the bottom of each of the game's stages, and will only open when all the blocks on top of it have been cleared. Once they'd been rescued, the likes of Boris, Curtis and Ruby joined the classic cast as playable characters, but the characters have no bearing on proceedings at all. Nevertheless, the game stands tall as a very good puzzler on the Game Boy Advance, and one well worth tracking down. Despite the success, the beasts went into hibernation in the years that followed.

Upon their belated reawakening in 2006, Ralph, George and Lizzie were sighted in full 3D for the very first time. *Rampage: Total Destruction* marked the series' second major revamp, with a major visual shift made possible by the greater capabilities of the PlayStation 2 and GameCube.

The classic trio of George, Lizzie and Ralph were available from the outset, alongside new faces Gilman, Ramsey and Rhett (a blowfish, a ram and a rat respectively). But the three new faces were the tip of the iceberg as the game introduced a huge number of new monsters, taking the cast to a grand total of 30, representing monsters both traditional and bizarre. Greater distinguishing characteristics were introduced with the new breed – for example Bart (a bat, naturally) could use his wings to aid his jumping tremendously.

Despite the shift to 3D visuals, the game still played in a similar manner to its predecessors, with level designs that may as well be 2D and buildings which fall straight down after taking a set amount of punishment. The major addition was the inclusion of boss stages. Taking place in the final area of each city, these involved taking out one of Dr Vector's powerful enemy craft in addition to destroying all of the buildings present.

Monsters retained the abilities gained in previous games, with kicks and special moves still available, but gained a few new tricks. The first of these was the ability to scale the front of buildings, rather than simply climbing the sides as in the 2D games, which allowed easier access to power-ups and tasty humans. The second was the inclusion of a specific grab button, which allowed players to grab hold of objects such as cars and chuck them into buildings, causing huge damage.



» [GameCube] Bosses such as this hover tank are the main gameplay addition for *Rampage: Total Destruction*.

» [GameCube] With 30 monsters (and 40 on the Wii), characters became increasingly outlandish.



» [GameCube] The new 3D visuals convey a sense of height well when tall buildings are scaled.



Upon its release in 2006, *Rampage: Total Destruction* received the series' warmest critical response since *Rampage World Tour*, aided by a budget price tag and the inclusion of both of the arcade games as bonus content. The large amount of characters and stages on offer was praised, but the general repetitiveness and failure to make significant advances on the original template once again drew criticism.

Rampage: Total Destruction was ported to the Wii in time for the system's November 2006 launch. This version added ten more characters, including Ruby, Boris and VERN, plus an extra city. Unfortunately, the game failed to support the GameCube controller. The new control options were passable with the Nunchuk attachment but woeful without, due to the decision to utilise motion controls to simulate a joystick. The additional problems caused by the motion controls ensured that the game met a frostier response than the other two versions had just months prior.

Since Midway's bankruptcy in 2009, the series has lain dormant. That's not a situation that is guaranteed to last, though – while it has sometimes suffered outside of its native arcade environment, the *Rampage* series has maintained a following for decades. When asked to explain the appeal, those who have worked on the series never have to think for too long. "It's one of those games [where] you can just jump in and have mindless fun," says Kenneth Hurley, who produced conversions for Activision. "You can play it for five minutes or you can play it for hours. As a kid, who didn't have fun wrecking things?" Cathryn Mataga, programmer of the Game Boy Color version of *Rampage Universal Tour*, homes in on the theme of the game. "It was the characters and the humour. Players felt a bit of guilty pleasure from squishing and eating people."

"Perhaps it's the empowering aspect of being the anti-hero, or the unique absurdity of the theme, or simply that there was no 'wrong way' to play it," opines Brian, who was convinced of the game's thematic appeal before it went out on test. "The thing I remember most about watching people playing *Rampage* at the arcade was that it was not uncommon to see players laugh out loud as their once-powerful characters shuffled naked from the screen. *Rampage* was simply about having fun." And fun, if you ask us, is what a classic game is all about.

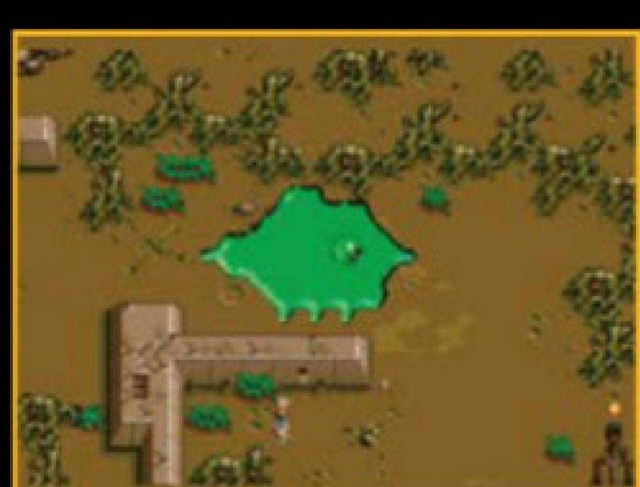
> **"Players felt a bit of guilty pleasure from squishing and eating people"**
> Cathryn Mataga

IT'S GOOD TO BE BAD The games that let monsters take revenge



THE MUNCHER 1988

■ Originally known as *T-Wrecks*, a promotional tie-in with Chewits made this demolition derby rather more cuddly than originally intended. The premise is very similar to *Rampage*, as you control a huge dinosaur sprite and smash up cities. The main difference is in plot, the dinosaur being motivated by having its eggs stolen.



THE OOZE 1995

■ Dr Daniel Caine has discovered a terrible secret at The Corporation and plans to blow the whistle, but instead meets what appears to be an untimely end drowned in chemical waste. However, he simply becomes the game's titular green ooze, and swears revenge against his morally bankrupt former colleagues.



STUBBS THE ZOMBIE IN REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE 2005

■ Eddie Stubbs had a rough life, eking out a living as a salesman in depression-era America before meeting his end. Death provides ample opportunity for revenge, especially due to the natural army-gathering capabilities zombies have.



DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2005

■ *Destroy All Humans!* is a little less revenge and a little more rescue mission, as our protagonist Crypto is trying to rescue a wounded compatriot from the American army. The action soon escalates, and Crypto ends up taking his battle to the very top of the US government.



SPACE INVADERS GET EVEN 2008

■ Though it was released in 2008, any retro gamer should be able to figure out what's going on here – the citizens of Earth have turned on each other and the invaders have spotted an unmistakable opportunity. Your job is to use the UFO to wreak havoc upon cities worldwide.

TAU CETI

From a background of teaching maths and coding simple adventure games, Pete Cooke emerged as one of the brightest and most ingenious 8-bit coders. Graeme Mason talks to those involved with his most famous creation, the technically stunning space adventure Tau Ceti



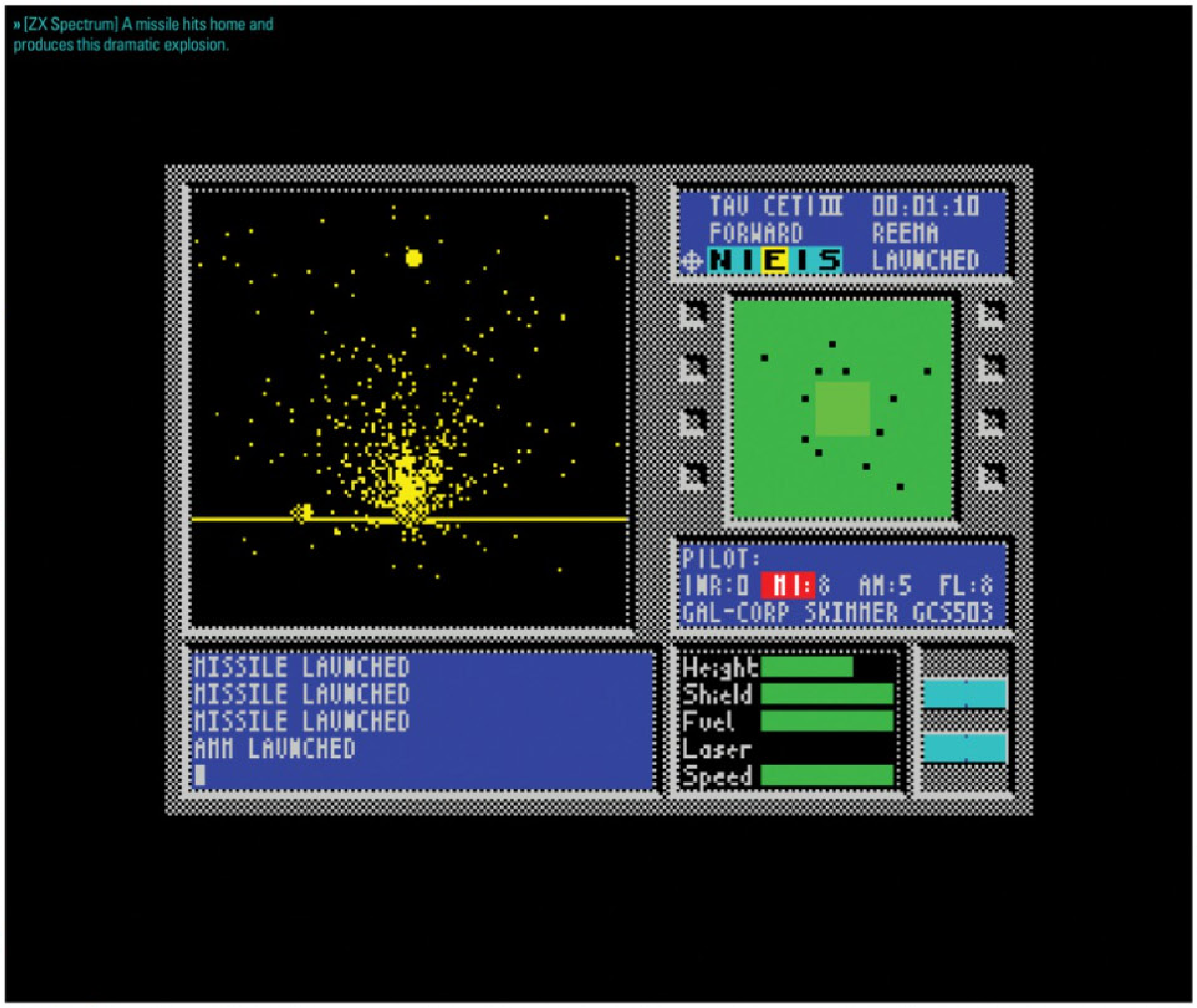
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CRL GROUP
- » **DEVELOPER:** PETE COOKE
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** SPACE SHOOTER

It's 1984. Sitting in his office at King's Yard, East London, the smartly dressed young entrepreneur turns a package over in his hands. He has received a dozen similar envelopes in this week alone, all with plaintive, often elongated, letters explaining the plot and machinations of the enclosed game. He takes the tape, clicks it into his cassette player and tuts as the game refuses to load. The man takes the tape out and pauses, poised to dispose of it into a nearby wastebasket. But he doesn't; instead he glances at the terse letter that accompanies the tape and opens his drawer, taking out a small screwdriver and adjusting the azimuth of the tape deck a minute fraction. This time-honoured method succeeds and moments later CRL Group boss Clem Chambers is staring in awe at the game in front of him.

Working for Clem as software development manager was Ian Ellery. "We'd often get sample tapes sent it 'on spec'," he explains, "and you never knew what would be on them. Some would be just animations, others demos or even complete games. But with *Jack Knife* I was immediately taken by the concept: it was simple yet absorbing." Clem Chambers recalls the letter particularly. "Long descriptive letters generally came with abysmal games while letters from those confident of their offering were normally short and sweet." He says. Pete Cooke's meticulous and small handwriting succinctly did its job and the game was quickly snapped up by CRL before being released as *Juggernaut*. "It was vectorscan, which was cool in the same way as the arcade games *Asteroids* and *Star Wars* had been." said Clem in **Retro Gamer**'s archive feature on his company back in issue 97. "It was also fun in a challenging way and had realistic physics which was very unusual back then."

Juggernaut was a moderate seller, but CRL was keen to see what its latest freelancer had in store for them. "I asked Pete what he was going to work on next," says Ian, "and he said he was planning something with flying saucers. We soon got a demo in the post." As with most Pete Cooke games, the idea actually stemmed from a technical angle, in this case the graphical technique of having light and dark shading across 3D shapes. Pete himself explains: "I don't think any other game at the time had used the same light and dark shading across shapes. But I remember seeing a game called *Gyron*, which had solid spheres in a maze. I wondered how the designers

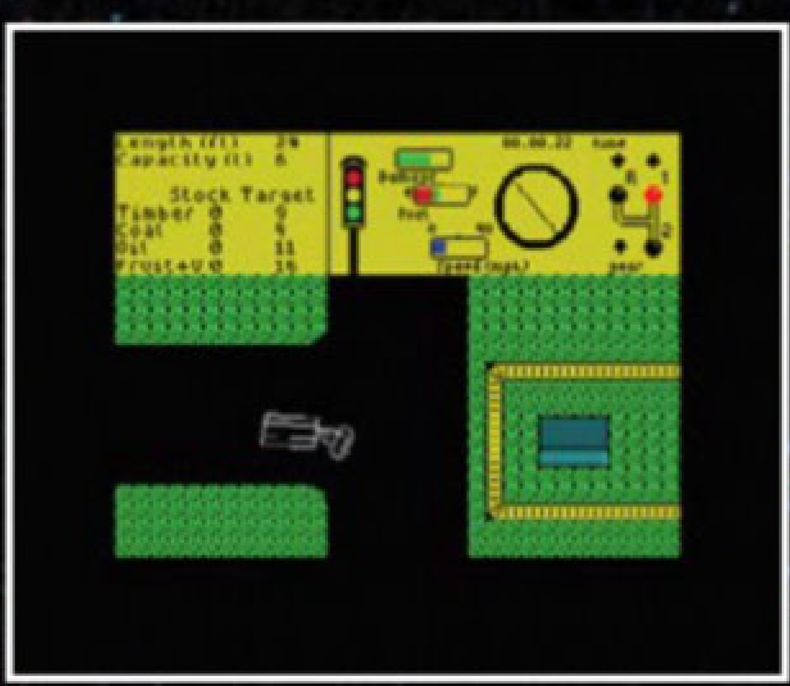


» [ZX Spectrum] A missile hits home and produces this dramatic explosion.

> **"It was also fun in a challenging way and had realistic physics which was very unusual back then"**
> Clem Chambers on Pete Cooke's debut for CRL, Juggernaut

had created solid shapes that could scale so smoothly." Having been highly impressed, like many, by another Firebird game, *Elite*, Pete was inspired to put his idea into a space-themed shooter – only set on planets rather than in space itself. "Once I saw the shapes working, it made me think of images from the moon where there's no atmosphere to blur the light and dark. As a result you get a sharp contrast." The resultant demo was technically very striking, recalls Ian Ellery. "It was beautiful. You flew along in your craft and flying saucers were all around you. You could see them glide past, complete with that lovely 3D effect." The CRL man was soon in Leicester chatting with Pete and developing further his idea along with the plot that would drive the game. Ian would also ultimately assist with static screens and story elements, as well as the box design.

Clem himself, busy with the myriad day-to-day requirements of running a busy software house, left them to it. "My tack was always to let the talent do what they wanted," he proclaims. "Pete had got these shaded flying saucers working and that was where he was going with his next game. It looked cool and spooky and something that was going to be awesome." CRL resident coder Paul Stoddart also recalls the original flying saucer demo. "To be honest, we were all blown away when we saw it," he tells us. "I even got to meet Pete and he explained to me some of the computing systems behind the graphics generation. Once he explained it seemed so clear. Clever guy."



» [Amstrad] Articulated lorry simulator *Juggernaut* was Pete Cooke's first game for CRL.

As the game developed, Pete used his love of classic and modern science fiction to good effect. "There were a lot of influences such as *Star Trek* – with the terminology – and also astronomy." he says. Pete's mum, a keen follower of astronomy, helped him find an actual star and one stood out in particular. "I saw one, it was a G-type star [such as our sun] and I thought, that's a nice name, that'll do. And CRL accepted it." The star in question was of course none other than Tau Ceti [see boxout for more information]. In addition, many ideas and concepts, especially those of man exploring the universe, were informed from Pete's admiration of authors such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Sheckley, Larry Niven and Frederik Pohl. There was no doubting *Tau Ceti* had breadth of ▶

OUR DESTINATION, THE STARS

A Tau Ceti Timeline

2047
■ Interstellar travel is made reality with the invention of the hydrogen scoop, enabling the gas to be collected between stars.

2050
■ The first wave of colonists departs Earth for four nearby systems: Alpha Centauri, Van Maanen's Star, Beta Hydri and Tau Ceti. Tau Ceti's life-supporting planet is an inhospitable desert world, but for 90 years its colony grows and prospers.

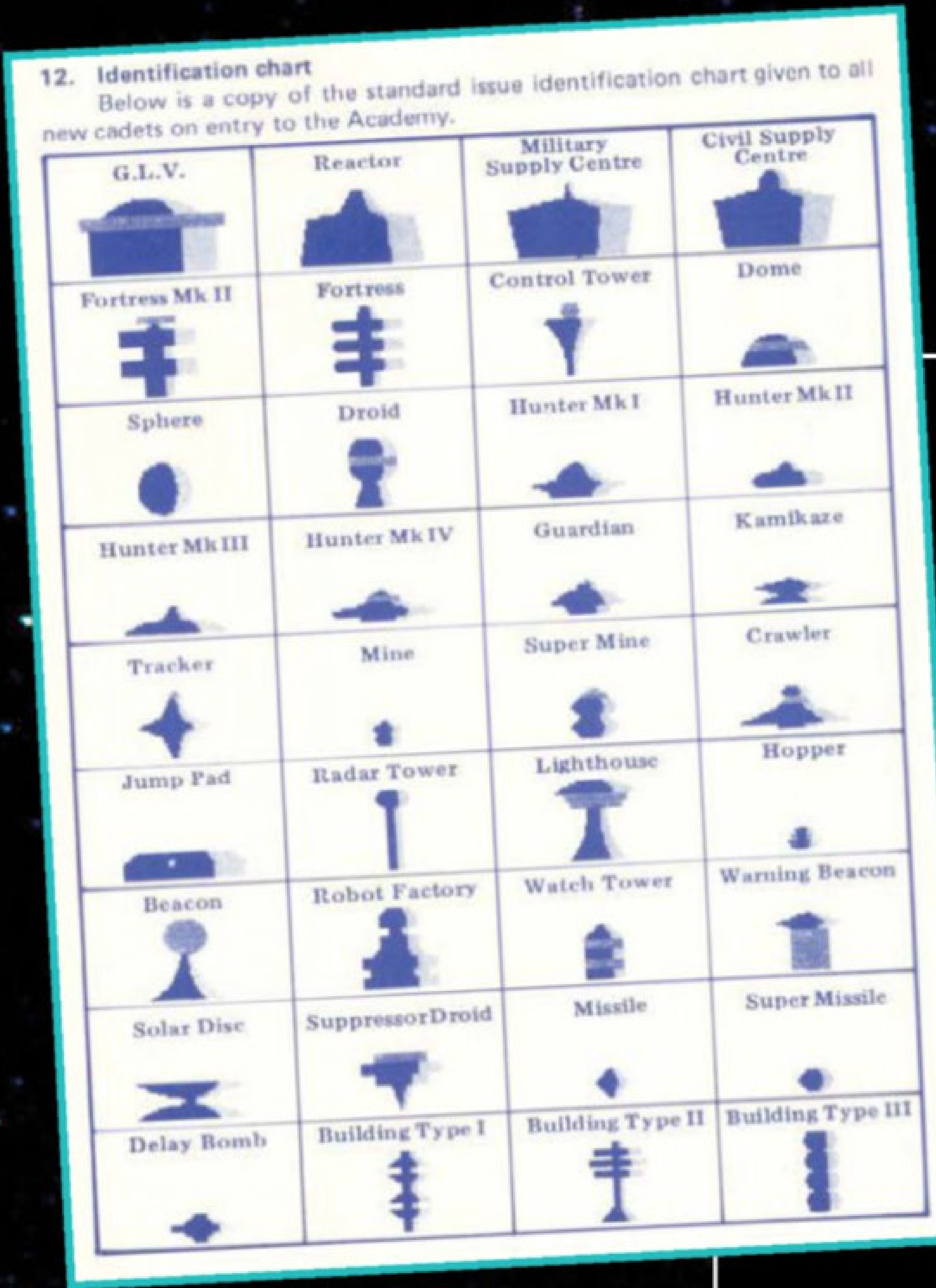
2150
■ Disaster strikes. A vicious plague called Encke's Syndrome devastates Tau Ceti. Eventually the few surviving colonists abandon their home and return to Earth, leaving the planet to its robotic maintenance systems.

2152
■ A cure is discovered for the plague. Meantime, contact with Tau Ceti's robotic guardians is lost and a huge meteor strike is blamed.

2164
■ It is decided to re-colonise Tau Ceti and an expedition leaves Earth. The spaceship lands safely before transmitting a mayday message moments later, followed by silence. Experts conclude the planet's robots have malfunctioned following the meteor strike. A mission is devised whereby a single heavily-armoured ground skimmer must shut down the fusion reactor within Tau Ceti's capital city of Centralis, thereby deactivating the robots without further damaging the planet's buildings. Over to you!



» The odd-shaped card box that proved to be such a disaster for CRL.



» Know your enemy with the *Tau Ceti* identification chart.



» [ZX Spectrum] Approaching a volcano.

ambition. But how was it all going to fit into 48K? "That did worry me," admits Pete, "as I wondered how on earth I'd fit all this stuff into such a small space. I got around it with tricks such as generating data from random seeds, so when you zoom in on a city it's expanding the data from a compressed form. I also made the viewscreen small, as small as I'd dare, because you're copying data across every frame and the more you copy, the longer it takes. And consequently, the slower the game gets."

Tau Ceti began to take shape. Pete Cooke, while working meticulously on the code that would shift the game's world around at pace, also designed graphics and the somewhat sparse sound effects. In addition to the static graphics the player saw whenever the skimmer docked at a building, Ian Ellery also designed the game's loading screen and chipped in with suggestions whenever he saw fit. "I met Clem a few times during development," recalls Pete, "but most of the day-to-day stuff was with Ian. I remember being introduced to the in-house guys but the majority of the design and coding work was done at home. As the game neared completion, I'd be there more often, showing Ian and Clem what I'd done." Despite Pete's trials in squeezing every last byte from the Spectrum's memory, other facets, such as the AI, proved to be much more straightforward. "The enemy AI wasn't complex," he explains, "as they would just be programmed to approach and attack the player. But because the game is in 3D and they are all around you, the simplicity of each individual saucer's behaviour was masked." Concentrating on keeping everything moving quickly was at the forefront of Pete's mind. "I spent a good deal of time optimising the central building draw and flying saucer code. Once I'd got these as fast as I could, it was down to making sure the screen didn't get too busy and slow the whole thing down." Like many games of the era, constricted by parsimonious memory allocations, it was a balancing act between speed and screen elements. "I suppose with more RAM I could have added more types of building and a wider range of enemy ships," says Pete. "Also, the map could have been larger, but I just kept building the game up until there was no space left."

> **"Once I saw the shapes working, it made me think of images from the moon"**
> Pete Cooke, develops the Tau Ceti gameplay

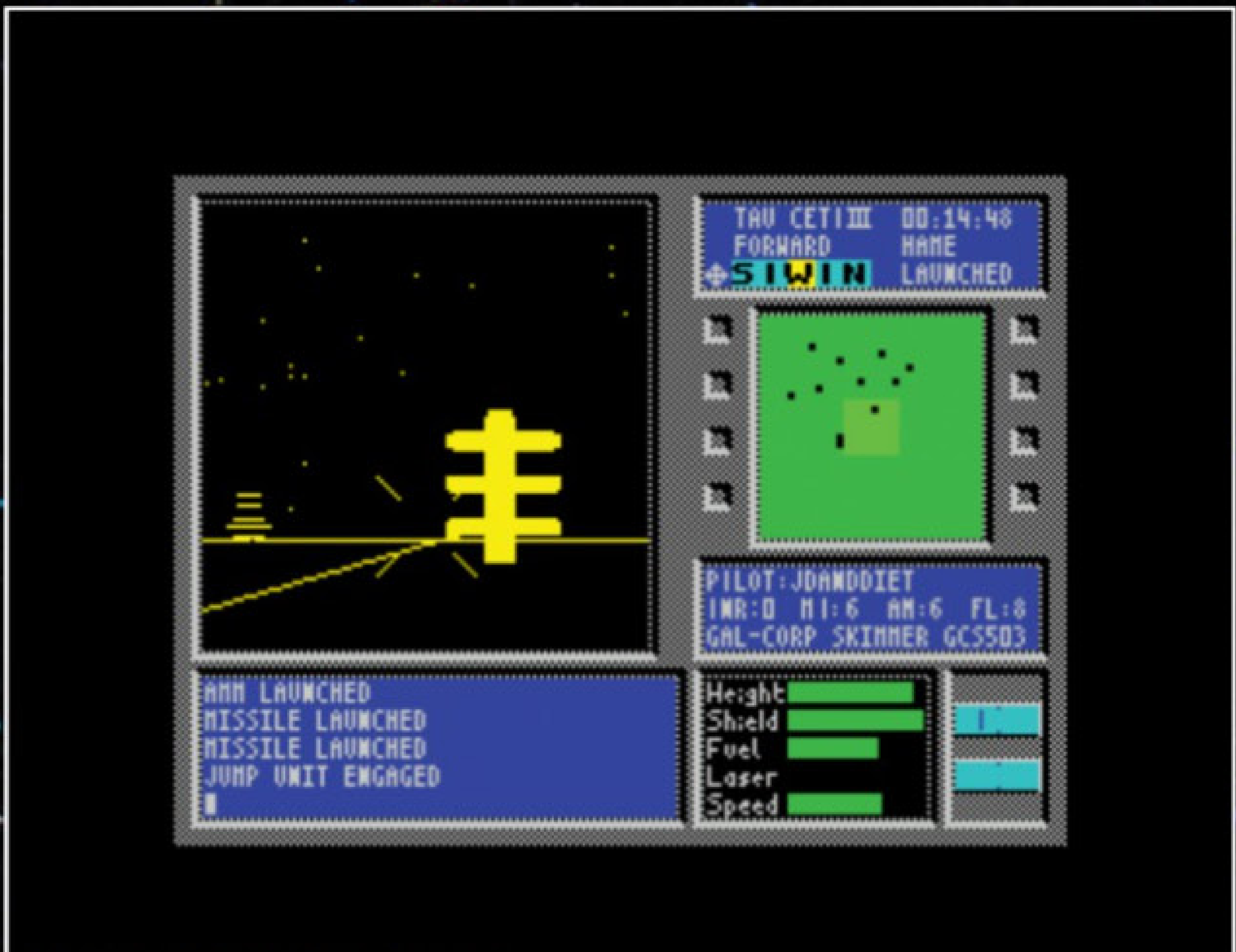
With CRL convinced it had a hit under development, conversions to other formats were soon being organised. Pete Cooke himself took care of Z80 chip-bedfellow the Amstrad while John Twiddy handled the vital Commodore 64 port. "I'd written some 6502 code but was worried about how much time it would take to learn another OS and another environment," says Pete, "and having already produced the Spectrum and Amstrad versions, I was keen to try something new rather than another port." Of the Commodore 64 game, CRL's Paul Stoddart recalls: "I was amazed, as although it had extra memory, the C64 was short on grunt for maths processing. But its coder found a math lookup table shortcut to speed up a key routine, thus matching the visual refresh of the Spectrum version." Subsequently, when the CRL in-house team saw the result, they were all 'blown away' once more upon seeing *Tau Ceti* in action. Pete agrees, adding: "Getting the game running on a C64 was quite an achievement, and I know a lot of people loved that version." Other versions were converted by Comtec, aka Derek Baker, who had coded a few early CRL games such as *Rescue*. So CRL was confident – what about its creator? "I was actually really chuffed about the game as I knew it was going to just work," smiles Pete. "When I showed it to the kids [Pete was running an after-school



» [ZX Spectrum] There were several types of building to resupply in, although civilian ones offered no weapons.



» [ZX Spectrum] Docking with a reactor substation would gain the player one of the coveted fuel rods.

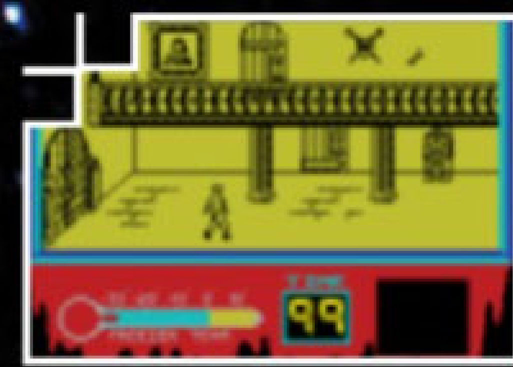


» [ZX Spectrum] The player's skimmer remains under constant attack from robotic defences.

computer club at this point] they said 'wow this is fantastic!' and I'd never had that reaction before. So I thought this is worth doing properly as it could be the best thing I've ever written – but if it doesn't succeed that's me done, I should give up." The programmer's faith was vindicated when he showed a pre-release version to *Crash* magazine on his return from a trip to CRL. "They made me feel very welcome and it was nice to show them what I had achieved and feed off their enthusiasm. I thought I had something special – the trip to Ludlow confirmed it for me."

Predictably, *Tau Ceti* was a huge hit and Pete Cooke's career path was set. The size of the market limited its success, but nonetheless ensured the game became CRL's biggest seller to date. In that respect, Ian Ellery admits to a touch of creative marketing. "The Commodore version was released in a standard box with an infamous quote on the cover," he explains of the words '…Best game ever' that adorned it. "We needed to print the sleeves and obviously the reviews weren't out," continues Ian, "so I cajoled Tim Metcalf, editor of *Computer & Video Games* into reading me his review which said something along the lines of 'Could this be the best game ever?'" CRL's software development manager admits those 'three little dots' were very useful when printing quotes, but his luck ran out with his idea for the odd-shaped card box that was utilised for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions. "It was shrink-wrapped and looked fantastic on the shelf, but the printers used a very flimsy card which squashed easily," he grimaces. CRL boss Clem Chambers says, somewhat more emotively: "It was a pentagonal card box that crushed very easily and we would have sold a lot more if we hadn't gone for that. But it was all alchemy back then so you can expect to splash acid on something."

Despite the fragile box, *Tau Ceti* shipped 20,000 copies on launch, according to Clem, and approximately 35,000 copies in total. At almost £10 per unit, it was CRL's most successful title by several light years. "I wasn't surprised," says Clem, "as *Tau Ceti* had it all and you could say it just didn't look possible on the Spectrum. *Knight Lore* was the first game to do that to me and *Tau Ceti* also had that 'wow' feel to it." The pressure for Pete to begin development of a sequel was soon mounting. "I think they [CRL] wanted a sequel right away," he recalls, "but I didn't want to do the same thing again unless I could come up with a fresh angle." Pete produced the technically interesting, if shallow, future sports game *Room 10* for CRL before devising the design-your-own-skimmer concept for *Tau Ceti*'s follow-up, *Academy*. But while it was still a good seller, it was the original that proved to be one of the most iconic 8-bit sci-fi shoot-'em-ups. "My games were always about what I could achieve and a specific technical idea," concludes Pete, "and I'd develop the game around that. With *Tau Ceti*, I was most proud of the shading idea, that was really great, and the fact it was a best-seller, which was kinda expected – but fantastic nonetheless." ★

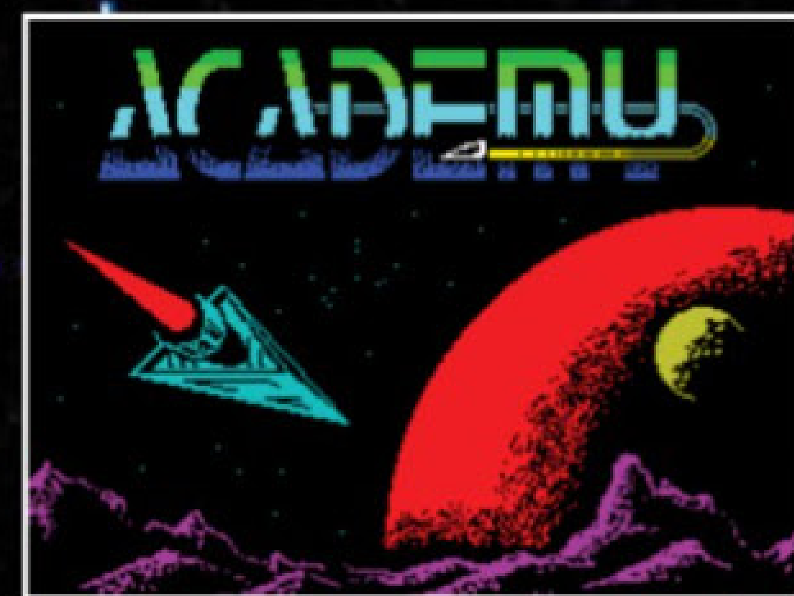


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GLUG GLUG
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1983

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD
YEAR: 1986

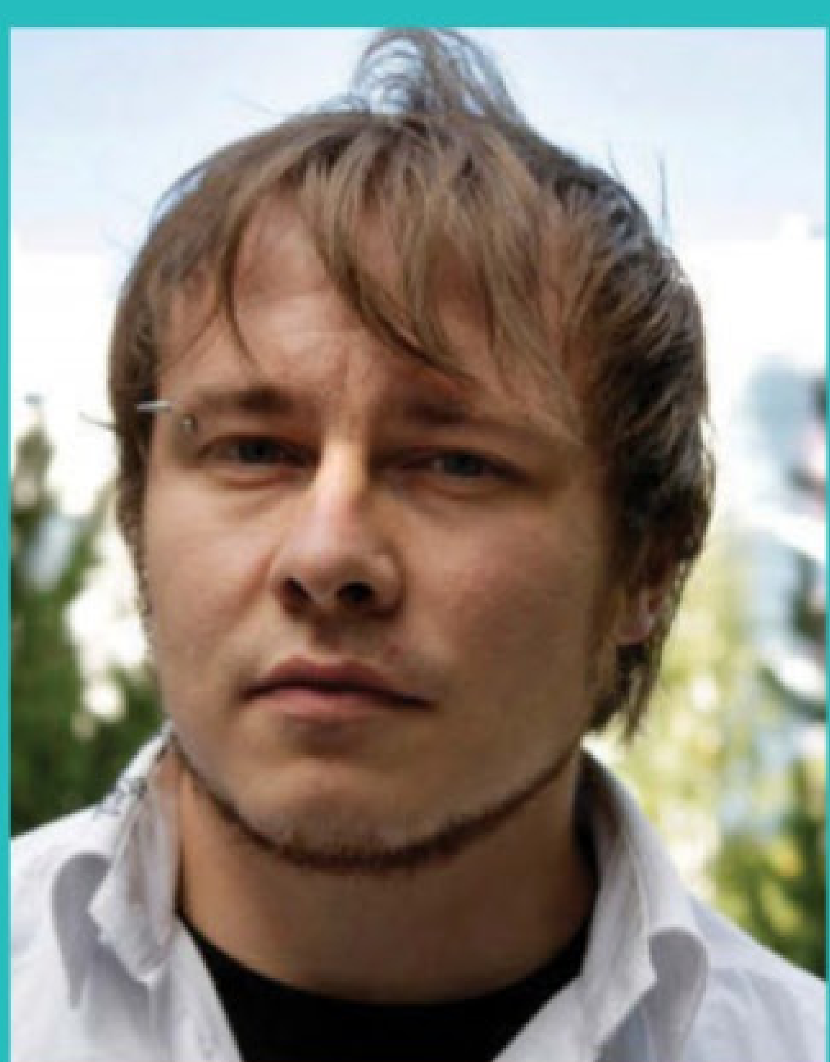
DRACULA
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD
YEAR: 1988



» [ZX Spectrum] *Tau Ceti*'s sequel, *Academy*, included a fun design-your-own-skimmer section.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Special Edition included a library as well as improved sounds and static screens.



THE ROCKY HORROR PLANET

Science guy Mikko Tuomi on the real Tau Ceti

"Actually, at just under 12 light years, Tau Ceti is one of the closest stars to our Sun," says Mikko Tuomi, researcher at the University of Hertfordshire's Science and Technology Institute. "And it's so similar to the Sun that we cannot tell any major differences at all." In December 2012, Mikko and his colleagues hit the news when their research revealed that there could be life-supporting planets surrounding the star. "The fourth possible planet in the system is on a suitable orbit that places it inside what we call the liquid-water habitable zone," explains Mikko. "Which is essentially an area that is neither too hot or too cold for liquid water to exist." Does he think human life could exist there? "Most likely not. Some forms of life, such as microbial, are possible, but we have no evidence of that." Of Tau Ceti's five potential planets, the innermost three are likely "hot, rocky and hellish places" according to Mikko, "while the outermost one is either an icy rock or a miniature version of Neptune with no clear solid surface. This leaves planet four, which could potentially contain Earth-like oceans only with a much thicker atmosphere due to its higher mass. And despite these studies, most of our knowledge is still theoretical," says Mikko. "But Tau Ceti is still being monitored continuously and data is accumulating fast. That's the best part of science; you never know what discoveries the future brings."

For more info, check out Mikko Tuomi's personal site: users.utu.fi/miptuom/index.html

Mario Is Missing!

CALL OFF THE SEARCH

» RETROREVIVAL



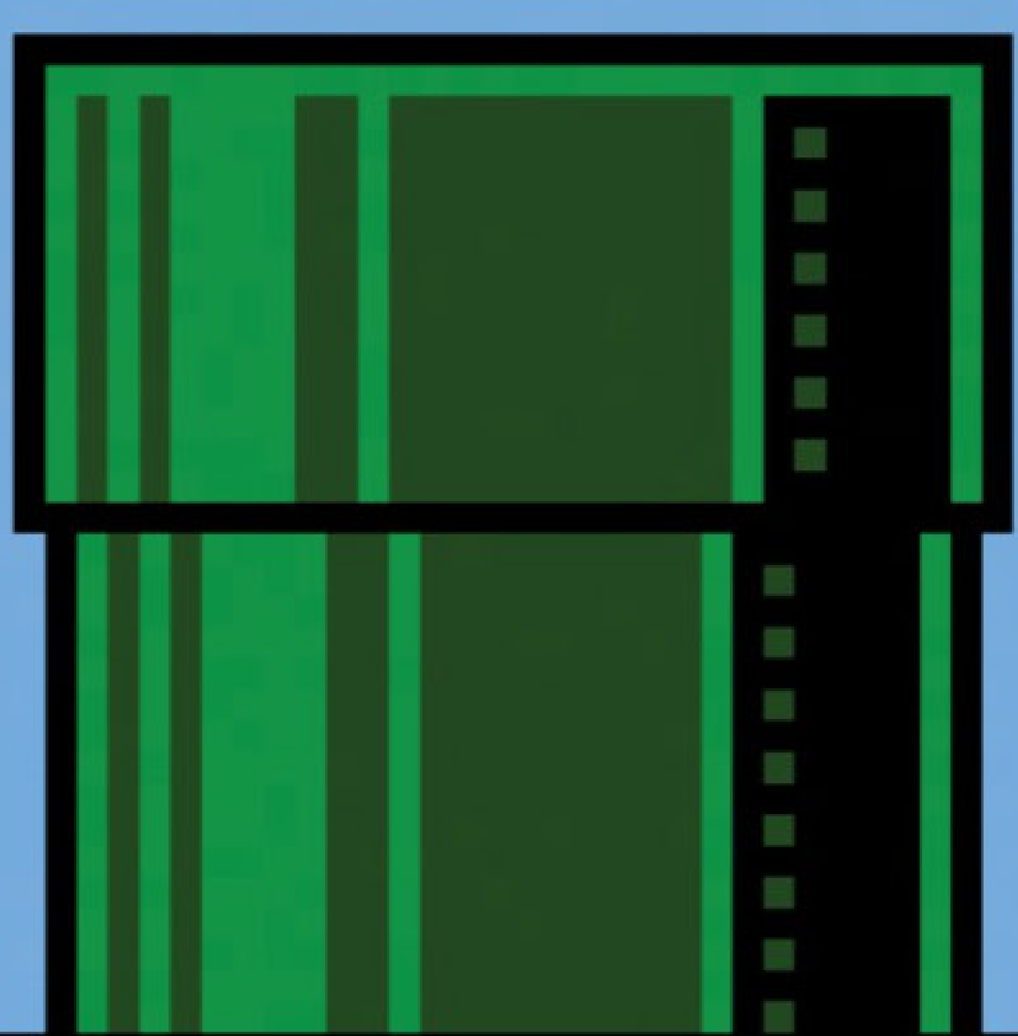
» NES » The Software Toolworks » 1993

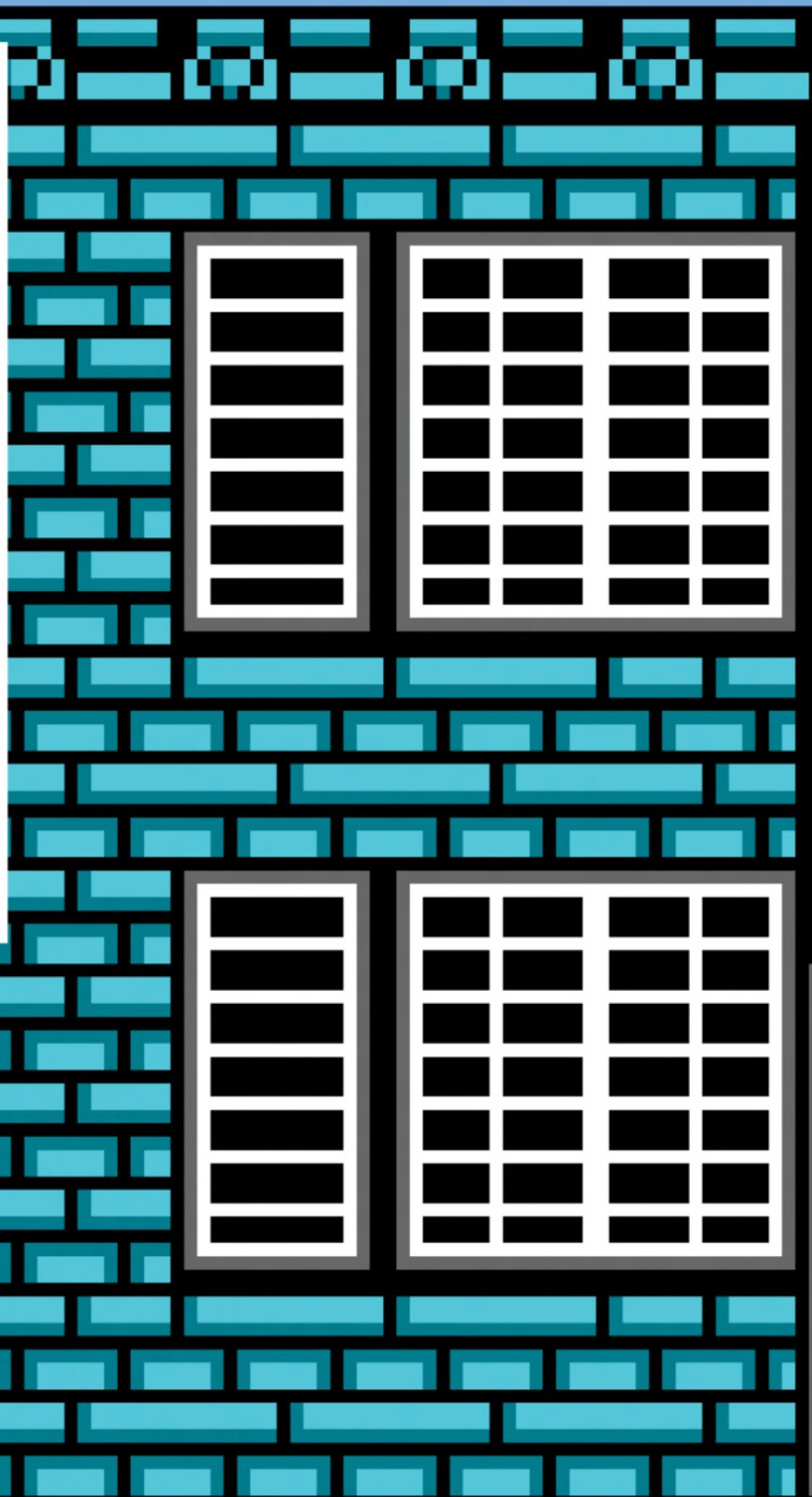
I love seeing younger people getting into retro gaming, but they do sometimes seem to miss the context a little. It's pretty easy to acquire a well-known duffer and make a mocking YouTube video, which will invariably contain the line "How could anyone buy this?". Well kids, let me tell you how that happens.

As the PlayStation and N64 gained popularity, my local video shop was selling off old Mega Drive and NES stock to clear the shelves. I had a PlayStation by this point, but I was a teenager with little disposable income and the games were being sold for £4 each, so I raided that place. With access to review books from *Sega Pro* and *Mean Machines Sega*, I ended up cherry-picking a whole bunch of great games including *Virtua Racing* and *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition*.

But with Nintendo, I wasn't so prepared. My NES was a recent arrival, a hand-me-down from a cousin, and I was ignorant as to what was available. Worse yet, so were my friends – we'd all grown up swapping Master System games. This made it rather hard to evaluate the white rental box with "Mario Is Missing!" scrawled on it. I'd just pull out my phone and look online these days, but neither mobile phones nor internet connections were commonplace back then, so I went with my limited knowledge of Nintendo. Mario is always good, right?

Wrong. I'd picked up one of those dreaded 'edutainment' games, in which Luigi wanders around various cities, retrieves cultural artefacts and answers trivia questions. Needless to say, it wasn't the experience I expected – but how was I to know? *









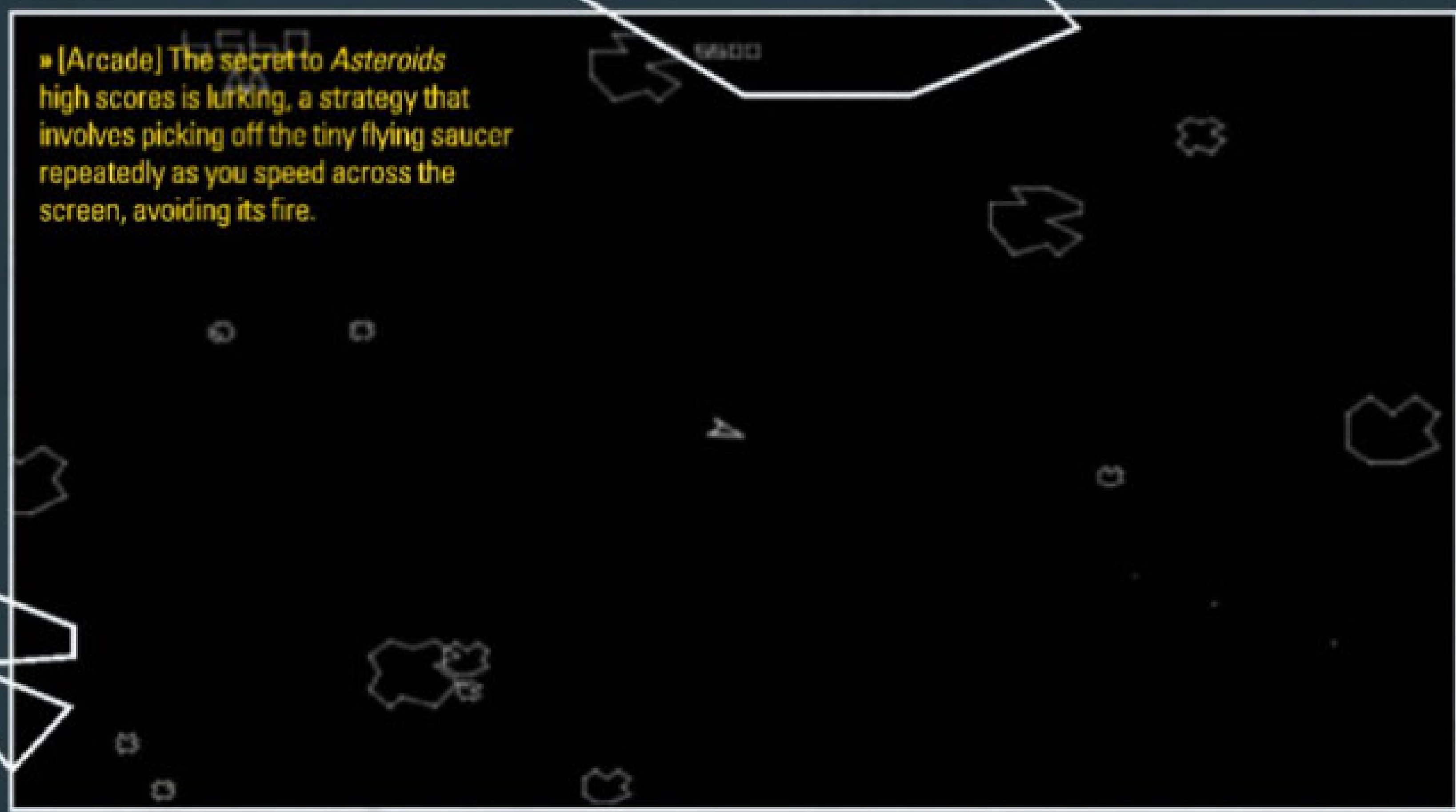
We all love classic arcade games, but could you play one for three days straight? Paul Drury meets eight marathon gamers and finds out about motivation, mind games and toilet arrangements

THE MARATHON MEN

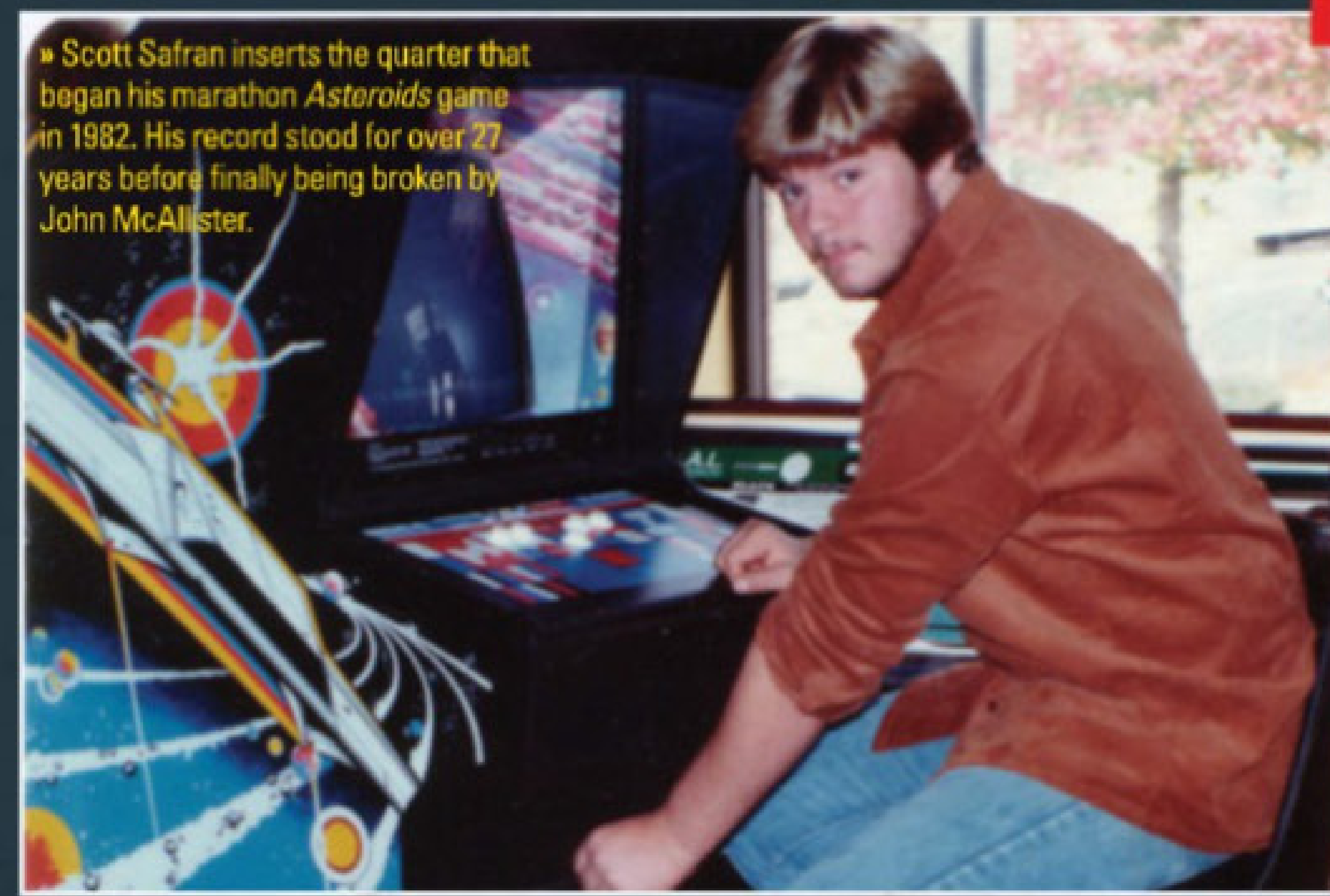
George Leutz thinks a while before answering. "I'd say the biggest obstacle to marathoning *Q*Bert* is the brain," he decides. "You're trying to solve this colour puzzle and your brain just gets exhausted. I'd been playing it for 60 hours and I just forgot how to play. I lost all my lives. It's like you're sleepwalking…"

George is one of an elite group of expert gamers who can tackle the coin-ops we grew up with for phenomenal lengths of time. Until this year, he held the world record for the longest marathon game, playing *Q*Bert* for over 84 hours on a single credit. Imagine staring at that pyramid for three and a half days, its Escher-inspired design burning into your retinas with each big-nosed bounce.

"It's the paranoia you really have to look out for," George whispers. "When you've been playing for over 48 hours, the mind starts playing tricks on you. You think someone's looking over your shoulder. You can't let yourself get caught up in that. That paranoid mindset can really get to you."



» [Arcade] The secret to *Asteroids* high scores is lurking, a strategy that involves picking off the tiny flying saucer repeatedly as you speed across the screen, avoiding its fire.



» Scott Safran inserts the quarter that began his marathon *Asteroids* game in 1982. His record stood for over 27 years before finally being broken by John McAllister.

"I was convinced there was a bat flying over me," adds *Frenzy* aficionado Paul Dean. "After 35 hours of playing, my eyes were shutting down and I kept seeing this black flutter. I thought someone had left a door open and a bat had swooped in."

Paul managed to vanquish the hallucinations as well as an army of evil robots for over 41 hours on his way to setting a new high score on Stern's follow-up to *Berzerk*. He tells us of the painful hand cramps and excruciating backache he endured during his epic game and warns us of the physical as well as mental challenge marathon gaming entails. Basically, he doesn't make it sound like a whole lot of fun. So why does he put his mind and body through this self-inflicted torture?

"You're proving you're the best in the world," Paul says, proudly. "You've really got to want it. If you're not willing to practice every day, you're not ready. You need to taste it. And you know, I'm a better player than I was in the Eighties. My mind is more cohesive and I have the fortitude and patience I didn't have back then. A lot of things come with age…"

We start to wonder whether this may indeed be a key motivator for our marathon men. Almost all of them are now middle-aged, playing the games they first tackled as teenagers. It's undoubtedly satisfying to show the world that despite your advancing years and receding hairline, you can still battle relentless alien hordes, gobble a mountain of pills and defend cities from an endless onslaught of nuclear missiles. You're proving you've still got it, that you're still vital and virile. Could marathon gaming be all about asserting one's masculinity?

"Well, I never attracted any women from doing it," laughs Dwayne Richard, an *Armor Attack* veteran. "For me, it was about man versus machine. Just how far can someone push themselves to beat the machine?"

For Dwayne, it may not be about recapturing his lost youth but he is interested in documenting all aspects of the golden age of the arcades. He has previously produced guerrilla-style documentaries *The King Of Con* and *The Perfect Fraudman*, looking at the controversy around the first 'perfect' *Pac-Man* game, and his latest film

> **"You're proving you're the best in the world. If you're not willing to practice every day, you're not ready"**
> Paul Dean

project focuses on the infamous 'Iron Man' tournament, an event that challenged hardcore gamers to play until they dropped. Organised by Twin Galaxies, the official record keepers of gaming high scores, and held at Johnny Zee's arcade in July 1985, Dwayne was there as one of the competitors and witnessed James Vollandt play *Joust* for a staggering 67 and a half hours, thereby winning the tournament but falling well shy of the almost insurmountable 100-hour goal that would've earned him $10,000 in prize money.

"People would slowly reach their breaking point and start thinking, what the f*** am I doing this for?" chuckles Dwayne. "No-one was getting any sleep and, you know, sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture. But hey, no-one's played long enough so it kills them…" ▶

» Tim McVey, a pioneer of the marathon gaming scene, pictured guiding that hypnotic snake through endless mazes in *Nibbler*.



GOING THE DISTANCE

So you want to be a marathon man or woman? Start by reading this sage advice gathered from all of our experts

PICK YOUR GAME CAREFULLY

■ Some titles, such as *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong*, have killscreens that prevent marathon games while titles like *Missile Command* and *Robotron* have bugs that can scupper your attempt. Ideally, choose a game that awards regular extra lives so you can build up a large reserve.

PREPARATION IS VITAL

■ Practice your chosen game relentlessly until you can play it in your sleep. Then practice going without sleep for 24 hours. Marathon gaming is a physical as well as mental challenge so eat healthily and exercise regularly. "Marathoning isn't for coach potatoes", warns George Leutz.

WEAR SENSIBLE SHOES

■ You're going to be standing up for over two days and only a fool would do that in stilettoes. Go for loose clothing, too. "Have more than one pair of underwear and take a moist cloth so you can keep your groin comfortable," advises Dwayne Richard. "You need to avoid chafing."

PICK YOUR TEAM

■ You may be playing solo but that doesn't mean you have to be alone. "You need people making you food or bringing you water, a towel or help you if your controls go down," argues John McAllister. "You can't do it alone." Talking to people while you play can also help you stay awake and reduce hallucinations.

GET YOUR BLADDER AND BOWELS ON SIDE

■ Don't put extra pressure on yourself or your internal organs by eating a lamb bhuna and downing ten pints the night before. Stay minimally hydrated while playing and eat sensibly. Plan toilet breaks carefully. If possible, grow an extra kidney.

» *Missile Command* is a popular title for marathon gamers. The long-standing high score of over 80 million was finally broken in 2013 by Victor Sandberg in a 56-hour effort.





» John Salter, pictured straight after playing *Armor Attack* for over 85 hours on a single credit. Next time, he's aiming to break the 100-hour barrier…

Ah yes, sleep, "the death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, balm of hurt minds", as noted by Shakespeare's Macbeth, who we think could definitely have marathoned *Gauntlet*. Whilst there's a general consensus that to qualify as a marathon gamer you must play a single game, without continues or buy-ins, for over 24 hours (play for over 48 hours and you achieve 'ultra marathon' status), the rules about sleeping on the job are more of a grey area. Most agree players should be allowed five minutes 'break time' per hour, though some suggest ten minutes, and there's some disagreement as to how much of this can be 'banked'. Playing continuously for a day could allow marathoners to grab several hours sleep, though this is dependent on whether they've accumulated enough lives to let the game kill off hundreds of their hard-earned men while they snooze and still have enough in reserve to continue once they wake.

For *Missile Command* expert Bill Carlton, nap breaks weren't an issue. "I've had people saying there's no way they could play a game for a whole day but if they had a diagnosed sleeping disorder like me, it's very easy," he winks. "It's impossible for me to fall to sleep even when I'm really tired."

And tired he was after his determined assault on the long-standing *Missile Command* world record, which was documented in Jeremy Mack's 2006 film *High Score*. It's an epic tale of dreams, dedication, disaster and roller-disco and is definitely worth seeking out on DVD if you missed it on the big screen.

Sleep wasn't an option for *Star Wars* ace Robert Mruczek, either, but for quite different reasons. Whilst the game does award a bonus shield for every Death Star destroyed, the maximum shield count is six, so leave the game unattended for just 30 seconds and it's all over for young Skywalker. In addition, Robert played his marathon 49-hour game in the city that never sleeps, New York, which meant there was no issue about the arcade staying open all night, but this also presented him with some unexpected challenges.

"You never knew who'd walk in," remembers Robert. "A kid asking for quarters, a Hare Krishna wanting a donation, someone trying to rob you… I mean there were no cops in the arcade. Or bathrooms, either."

> "Sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture but hey, no-one's played a marathon game long enough so it killed them…"
> Dwayne Richard

Yes, it's the question you've all been pondering but were too afraid to ask: how do marathon gamers manage those inconvenient bodily functions? If you're playing a title that allows you to accumulate a large reserve of lives, dashing to the toilet isn't necessarily a problem, but Robert didn't have that luxury. Surely he didn't resort to having a catheter fitted?

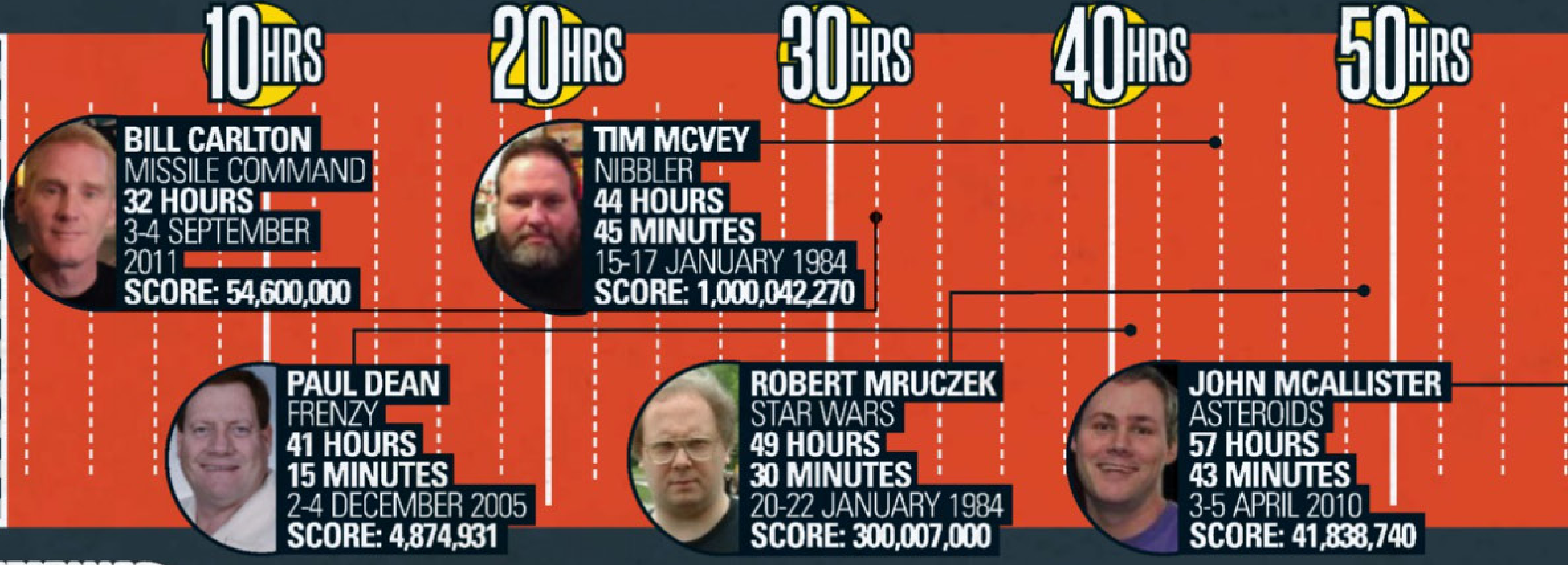
"I didn't need to use the bathroom throughout my two-day game but then I do have an advantage," he replies, enigmatically. "I have a third kidney. It's about three quarters of the size of a normal one and it helps me metabolise liquids and solids faster. Plus I sweat out very rapidly what I take in. In fact, I've had machines breakdown due to the accumulation of sweat and hair on the controls, so I empty myself out before a marathon. And you don't want to eat certain foods beforehand. Avoid anything greasy that'll increase your need to go. Some marathon gamers say their favourite food is McDonalds. More power to 'em but if you're gonna stand up for two days, you do not want to eat cheeseburgers…"

It seems *Frogger* isn't the only videogame where a turtle's head can spell danger. Robert, a former chief referee at Twin Galaxies, talks about the unique challenge of playing an arcade game in a public environment, compared with tackling a console title at home. Perhaps you've stayed up all night playing *Call Of Duty* online or been immersed in *World Of Warcraft* for days on end but there's a fundamental difference between that and inserting one coin, hitting start and playing until 'Game Over' finally brings closure. The classic coin-ops favoured by our particular breed of marathon gamers don't have pause buttons or breaks in the action or indeed much variety. *Missile Command, Armor Attack, Asteroids, Q*Bert*… it's striking how many feature a single screen. As great as those games are, can a marathon player really still enjoy them, given the endless repetition?

"I honestly still love playing *Nibbler*," Tim McVey assures us, who found fame in 1984 when he spent almost 45 hours scoring over 1 billion points on Rock-Ola's snake-in-a-maze title. "I'm always

THE BIG PLAYERS

The marathon gamers and how long their games of choice lasted



looking for perfection. I hate dying and I hate breaking my pattern. I think I have OCD. There's no way I could play a game for that length of time if I didn't enjoy it."

"I really didn't enjoy doing my marathon," disagrees John McAllister. "I was thinking, 'once I've done this, I never have to play *Asteroids* again'! I only did it because it was one of the 'Holy Grail' records. It had stood for a long time and I wanted to be known for breaking it, though I did hate taking the high score from a dead guy…"

You may be aware of the tragic tale of Scott Safran, who scored over 41 million on *Asteroids* during a long weekend in 1982 only to die in a rooftop Rod Hull-esque error of judgement in 1989 (you can read the full story in RG28). Talking of Holy Grails, there is one that we may soon see held aloft. "The next time I marathon *Armor Attack*, I believe 100 per cent that I can play for over 100 hours," states John Salter, who has already played on his weapon of choice for more than 85 hours, overtaking George Leutz's previous 'longest game' record. "I'll need to take my ability to the next level and play through the mind tricks, but I boldly predict I will do it."

It's testament to how vibrant the marathon gaming scene is that new records and incredible feats are still being achieved on videogames that began eating our coins over 30 years ago. Yet we have noticed that UK gamers seem to have been left behind by our American cousins. In an attempt to rectify this imbalance, we contacted Brit Tony Temple, the *Missile Command* world record holder on tournament settings, which doesn't grant players any bonus cities, challenging him to use his undoubted trackball mastery to crack the elusive 100-hour mark.

"Listen, mate, I love *Missile Command*," he replies, "but playing it for over four days? I'd rather have a marathon wank."

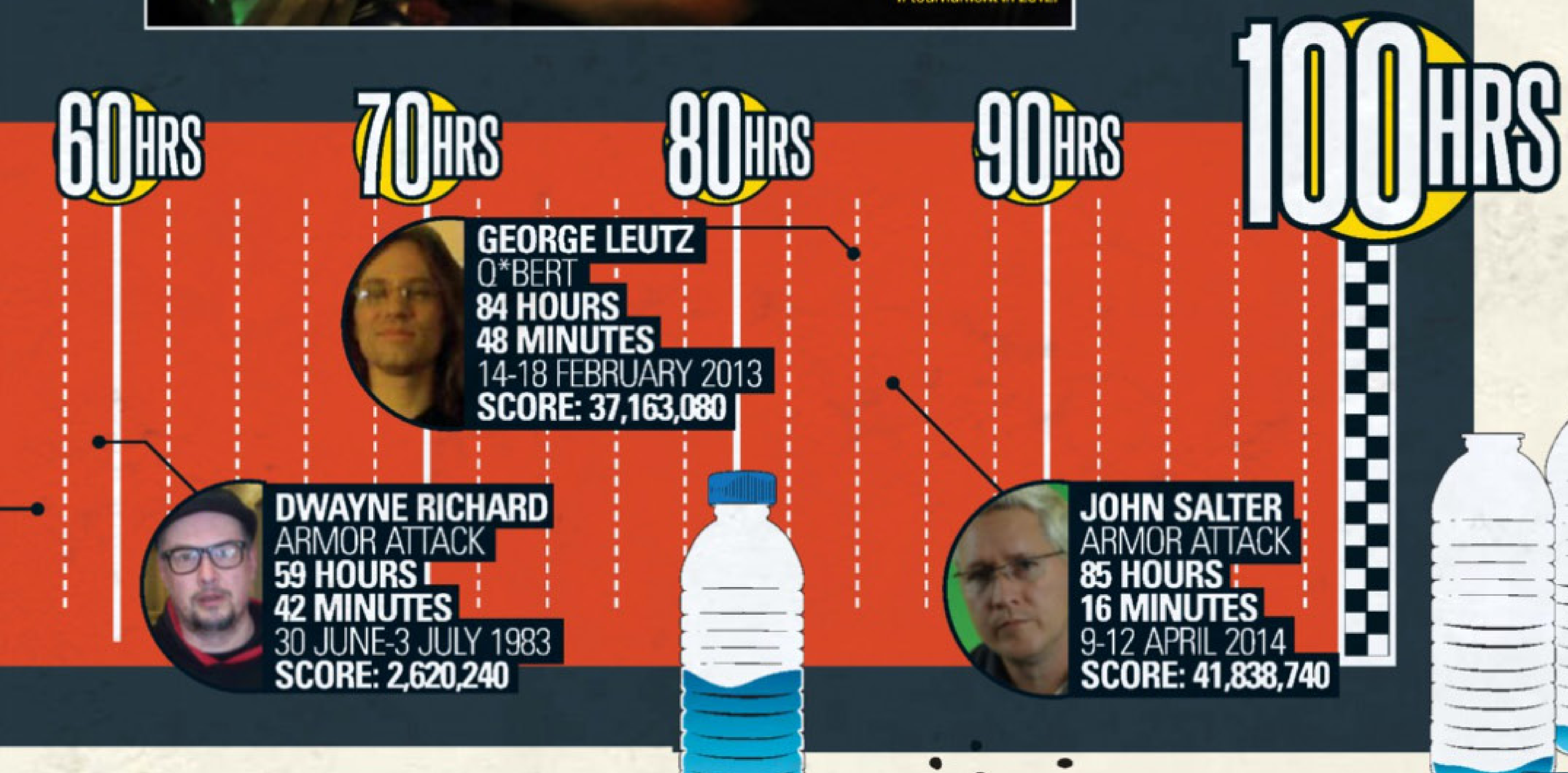
It seems Tony has his hands full but we urge the brave-hearted amongst you, those who can battle fatigue, repetitive strain injury and even their own bladder, to attempt to join the esteemed ranks of the Marathon Men. *



» The marathon gaming community is full of friendly rivalry. Here Paul Dean battles it out with Joel West for the *Frenzy* record at the Kong Off II tournament in 2012.



» After defending your cities for days, this must be a welcome sight for *Missile Command* marathoners.



Minority Report

It looks like you're writing a letter! You bought a PCW after all. But it wasn't all work, work, work, as more than 100 games were released for Amstrad's fancy typewriter. Martyn Carroll takes a break from writing articles and rounds up the best examples



Amstrad PCW photograph courtesy of boffy_b

special AMSTRAD PCW report



■ [Amstrad PCW] "It is dark, you cannot see. What now?" And so begins Kim's adventure.

SILICON DREAMS

■ DEVELOPER: LEVEL 9 ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Adventure game fans won't need to light a brass lantern or summon a cloud wizard to know that there's something slightly awry with this entry.** *Silicon Dreams* is not a single adventure but rather a collection of Level 9's earlier releases – *Snowball* (1983), *Return To Eden* (1984) and *The Worm In Paradise* (1985). These adventures, which form a sci-fi trilogy, were updated with expanded text, new location graphics and an improved parser, and released as a swish compilation by Telecomsoft in 1987. As *Silicon Dreams*, the titles made their debut on several new machines including the Atari ST, Commodore Amiga and Amstrad PCW. The PCW version is very similar to the ST and Amiga releases, albeit with monochrome location graphics. On the PCW you will find one unique feature – the full 90-column display is used. That's a clear ten-column triumph over the 16-bit versions!

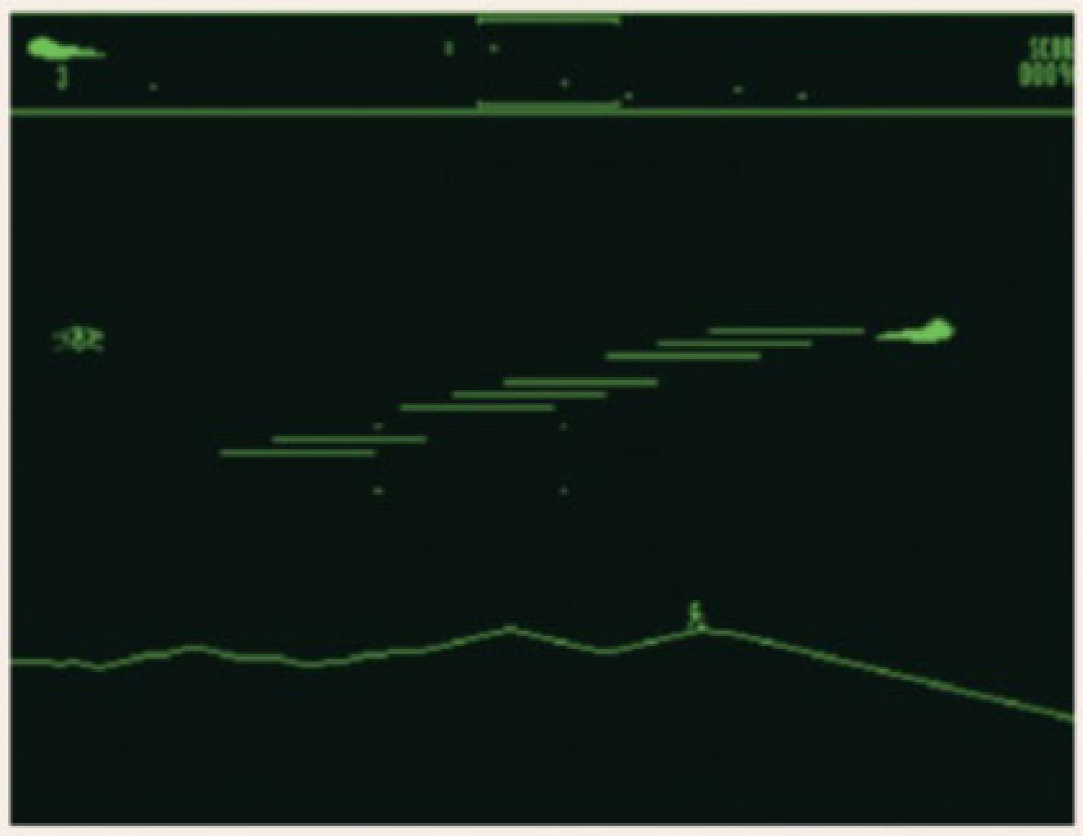
The titles themselves are terrific. They take place in a far-off future where humans are in the process of colonising Earth-like planets. In the first two games you play Kim Kimberley, a female space ace (although the character is intentionally unisex). In *Snowball*, she awakes aboard the titular spaceship to find it's been hijacked and set to collide with a star. You have to



» STARGLIDER

■ DEVELOPER: ARGONAUT ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **The PCW was** pretty capable when it came to 3D vector-style games and titles like *Tau Ceti* and *Catch 23* were released for the machine. Best of the bunch was *Starglider*, Jez San's 16-bit triumph that was masterfully converted to Z80 computers by Realtime Games. Content-wise, the PCW release is similar to the CPC version with the various missions and neat additions like the rear-view scanner. It does benefit from the PCW's wider display, showing more of the space-warring action on-screen, but obviously lacks the quality AY sound from the CPC version. One nice touch is mouse support which most would agree is the preferred method of controlling the game.



» GUARDIAN

■ DEVELOPER: ALLIGATA ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Alligata's *Defender* clone** was released under several titles including *Guardian*, *Defend Or Die* and, rather cheekily, *Defender*. There aren't too many arcade games on the PCW so this was a welcome release. And it clearly benefits from the coin-op's very basic graphics, which are a perfect fit for the PCW; lack of detail means that the game whizzes about as fast as it should and the frantic gameplay from the original is fully intact. *Guardian* is one of the best *Defender* clones available and the PCW version is great. *Alligata* also released a version of platform hit *Blagger* for the PCW that is also worth a look.

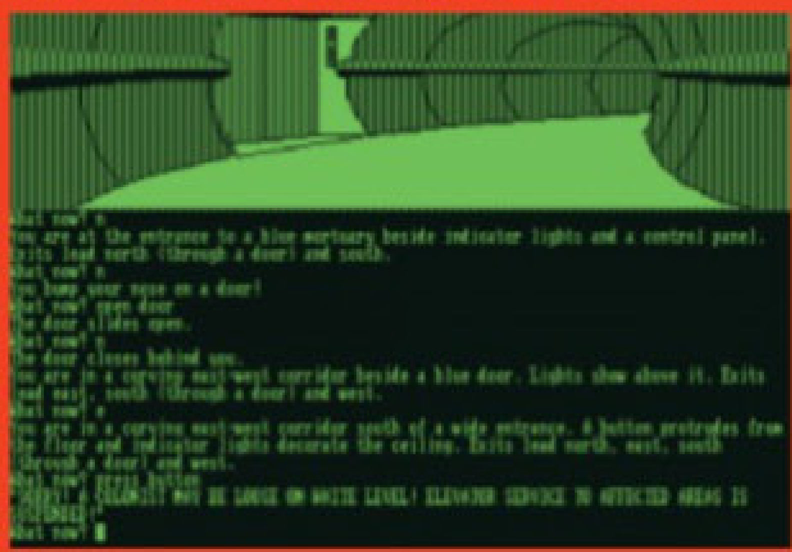


» LIVINGSTONE I PRESUME

■ DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Despite being an** Opera Soft release, this title will be familiar to many as it was picked up and published outside of Spain by Alligata. It's a jungle-set platformer in which you play reporter Henry Stanley as he searches for the eponymous missionary. The game is famously difficult, and the lack of colour on the PCW doesn't help, but this is one of those titles were you want to progress just to see what oddities lie deeper within the jungle. And any game that invites you to float downstream on a log, over waterfalls, has to be recommended. The sequel also arrived on the PCW and while it was twice the size it was only half as enjoyable.

» [Amstrad PCW] Watch out for those lethal Nightingales when patrolling Snowball's corridors.



» [Amstrad PCW] The second game begins with a bump as you crash land on the planet Eden.



» [Amstrad PCW] It's a good job you decided to wear that radiation suit.



explore the cavernous ship, evade deadly droids, negotiate a typically maddening maze and ultimately correct the Snowball's course. In *Return To Eden*, you find yourself on the colonised planet and once again have to save the Snowball, this time from the planet's robotic inhabitants who believe the orbiting ship to be hostile. The final game, *The Worm In Paradise*, takes place decades later when Eden has been fully colonised. You play a citizen who must uncover what's really going on behind a utopian facade.

The series becomes more sophisticated with each entry, both in terms of challenge and tone (witness the allegory in *Worm*). As such, *Silicon Dreams* is a collection that will appeal to a wide range of players, from novice adventurers to expert quest-heads. It's great value too – three great games for little more than the price of one is hardly a puzzle that needs solving. Throw in the CPC version (which is included on the same disk) and an accompanying 42-page novella, and you've got an extremely generous release.

The Amstrad PCW was designed for processing text so it's hardly surprising that interactive fiction is so readily available on the computer. Many other Level 9 titles were released, up to and including its final release *Scapeghost*. Fellow Brit adventurer Magnetic Scrolls published *The Pawn* and other titles on the PCW, while American master Infocom ported most of its catalogue to the machine. If you were tackling some writing chore on your PCW then a good text adventure could provide perfect respite. That dormant cursor would become imbued with life, inviting you to enter verb-noun combinations that would transport you from the home office to far-off lands and new worlds.

» ABOUT VIC-20

- PCW stands for 'Personal Computer Word-processor' and was designed primarily as a digital typewriter. It was powered by a Z80 CPU and came with either 256Kb or 512Kb of RAM.
- The PCW benefited from a 720-pixel screen, capable of displaying 90 columns.
- According to Amstrad, the PCW range clocked up sales of 8 million units, while the CPC range managed 3 million in comparison.



» [Amstrad PCW] The final chapter beings in a garden paradise, but is everything you see real?



» TROGLO

■ DEVELOPER: ACE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **It's Sega's *Pengo*** on the PCW, only with a little cave dweller replacing the plucky penguin from the arcade game. Everything else is pretty much the same: you slide the blocks to try and squish the blobs that are out to get you. Points are awarded on how quickly you clear the screen and you receive a bonus score for bringing together the three diamond blocks on each stage. This was an early PCW game so it's far from slick – the graphics are prone to flickering and the enemy AI is lacking – but the arcade gameplay is hard to beat. If you were a PCW owner looking for a score attack game then *Troglo* was more than fit for purpose.



» CORSARIOS

■ DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **This typically quirky** brew from Opera Soft is part beat-'em-up, part platformer. You play a pirate who's out to get the girl and the first part sees you busting out of jail and brawling with the ragtag locals. Two or three will surround you at a time and it's a case of punching your way out. Despite being able to wield various weapons, it's far too difficult for its own good. Thankfully, you can choose to play the second part – the platforming section – without entering a password. Here, you're on-board the enemy ship and you have to climb each of the masts and lower the pirate flags in order to save the girl. It makes little sense but it's fun nonetheless.



» THE PAWN

■ DEVELOPER: MAGNETIC SCROLLS ■ YEAR: 1987

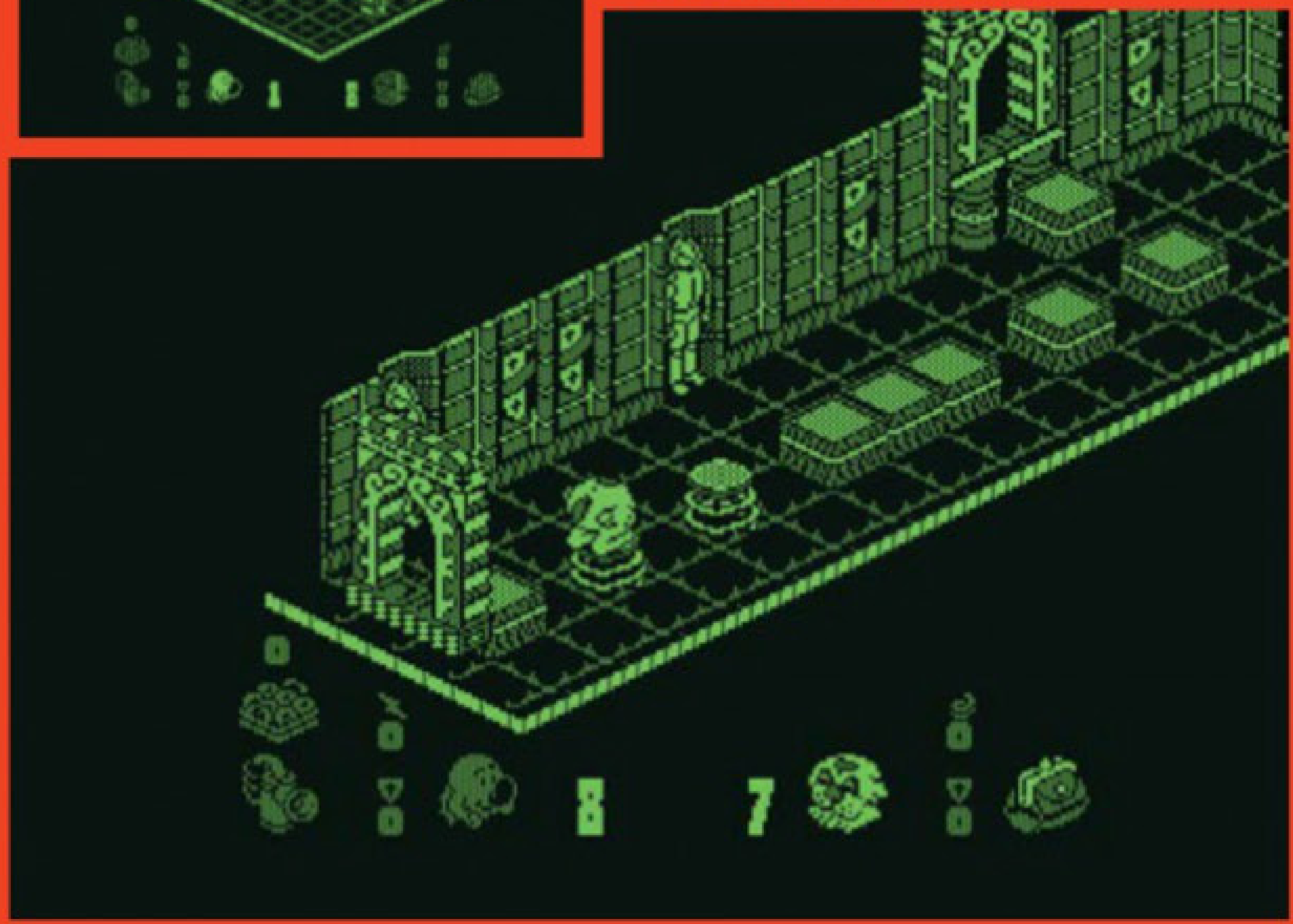
■ **This strong debut** from Magnetic Scrolls made a very agreeable appearance on the PCW. Mixing solid adventuring with a wicked sense of humour, and possessing a clever, multiple-command parser, it's not hard to see why this is regarded as a classic work of interactive fiction. The PCW version is almost identical to the CPC version, with the chief difference being the monochrome graphics. The game is famed for its vivid illustrations so it's slightly disappointing to see a lot of the detail lost. You also have to wait while the pictures are dragged from disk. Still, you can turn the images off and enjoy this fantastic slice of fantasy.

Minority Report

HEAD OVER HEELS

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN ■ YEAR: 1987





■ [Amstrad PCW] One of the game's triple rooms seen here in full on the PCW.

■ [Amstrad PCW] Heels pushes on alone in search of his partner Head.

■ **The PCW piqued the interest of programmer Jon Ritman who set about converting his isometric hit *Batman* to the machine.** Released by Ocean Software in 1986, the title was one of the first, if not the very first graphical game released for the PCW. The following year Jon brought the even better *Head Over Heels* to the machine.

The PCW version is very similar to the CPC version (if played through a green screen monitor, naturally). It does have one unique visual feature however that none of the other 8-bit or indeed 16-bit versions have: the game's double and triple rooms are displayed in their entirety on the PCW's generous screen. It's a bit like watching a widescreen VHS of a classic movie – you get the full picture as intended by the creator. Where the PCW version lacks is in the sound department, thanks to the machine's basic audio capabilities that are similar to the original Spectrum. At least Jon managed to coax some simple tunes out of the hardware, whereas with the majority of PCW games you're lucky if you hear the odd beep.



Pros and cons of the version aside, it's a simple matter of fact that *Head Over Heels* is one of the best games ever made. If the PCW was the only computer you owned back in the day then this was essential software, second only to the LocoScript word processor that came bundled with the machine.

» STEVE DAVIS SNOOKER

■ DEVELOPER: CDS SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1987

■ Three games for the price of one here, as unlike the other versions, the PCW release includes snooker, pool and billiards. It all works well despite the monochrome display.

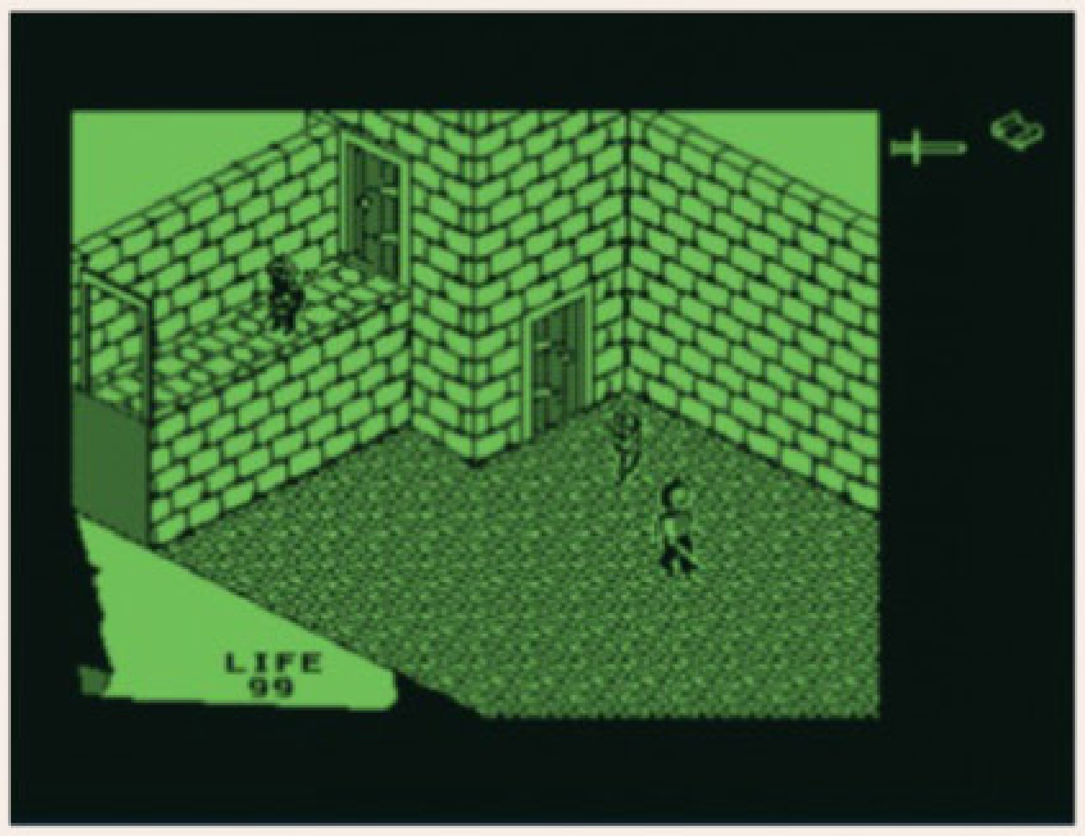


» TETRIS

■ DEVELOPER: MIRRORSOFT ■ YEAR: 1988

■ Every computer needs a version of *Tetris* and the PCW received the official release from Mirrorsoft. No frills, but then it is *Tetris* – falling blocks, plain and perfectly simple.





» FAIRLIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: THE EDGE ■ YEAR: 1986

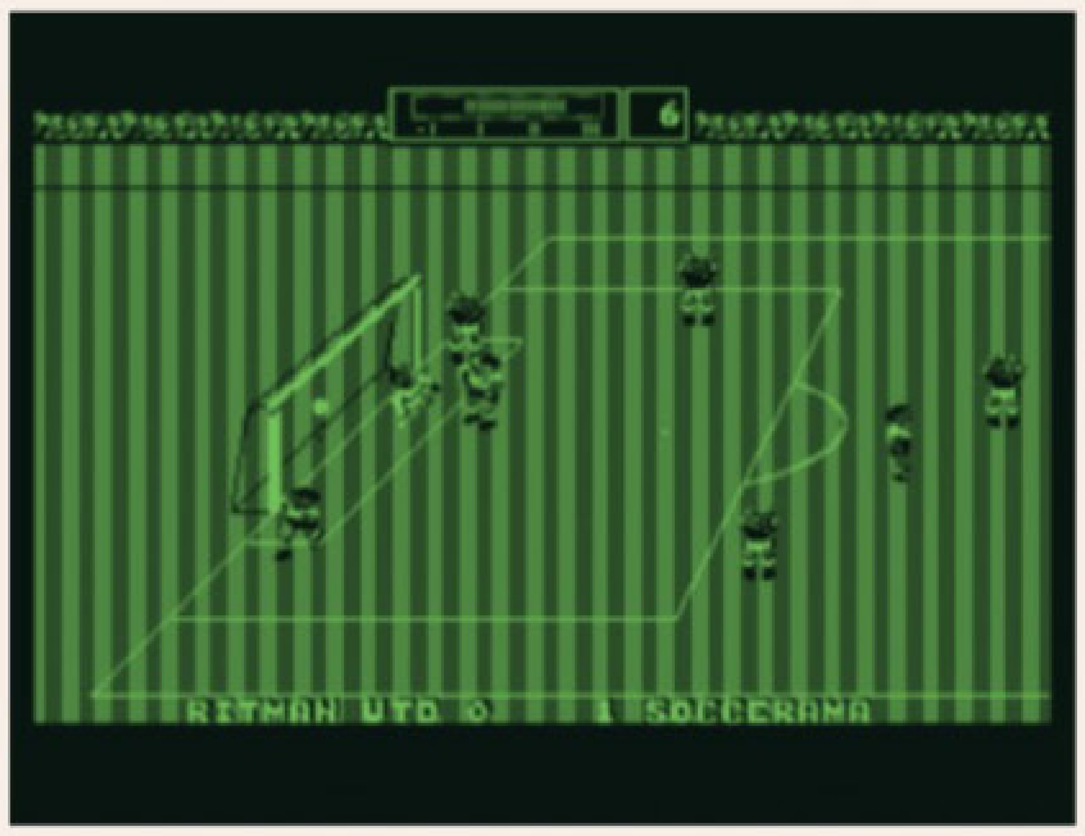
■ **Jon Ritman's brace** of *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* would surely be the titles to go for if you were looking for an isometric adventure on the PCW, but there was definitely room for *Fairlight* on the machine. While indebted to Ultimate's Filmation games, it doesn't follow the template as closely as others. The castle setting is very well done and there are very few similar-looking screens. There are some good puzzles too, and lots of nice touches like the guards who disappear under their helmets when hit. The Edge revealed that the PCW version sold surprisingly well, prompting it to also release *Fairlight II* on the machine.



» AFTER SHOCK

■ DEVELOPER: INTERCEPTOR SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Games set in** bleak wastelands have been done to death over the years, but when *After Shock* arrived and invited players to explore a city torn apart by an earthquake it felt both fresh and chilling. The game is mainly text only, but it does feature a number of images depicting the devastation. These screens benefit from having been specially drawn for the PCW rather than copied from other versions. The game does suffer from some maddening idiosyncrasies (the 'get' command is not recognised, for example), and solutions are often very specific ('lubricate mechanism' to fix a rusty lock anyone?), but this is a thrilling adventure.



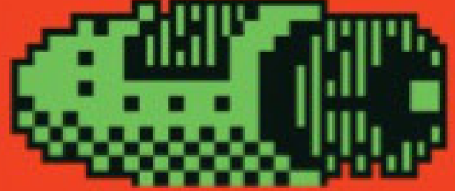
» MATCH DAY II

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **There aren't many** sports titles on the PCW and the ones that are don't deserve much of a mention. *Match Day II* is the exception, and you imagine that's largely because creator Jon Ritman handled the conversion himself rather than farming it out. It also helps that Jon ported the CPC version, which was already designed to be playable on a monochrome monitor, so you can tell the two teams apart. On its release this was probably the best football game available, in that it was more accurate than most, with loads of options to tweak, while still a lot of fun to play, particularly against a friend. It was top of the league and back of the net, as cliché dictates.

THE LAST MISSION

■ DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT ■ YEAR: 1987



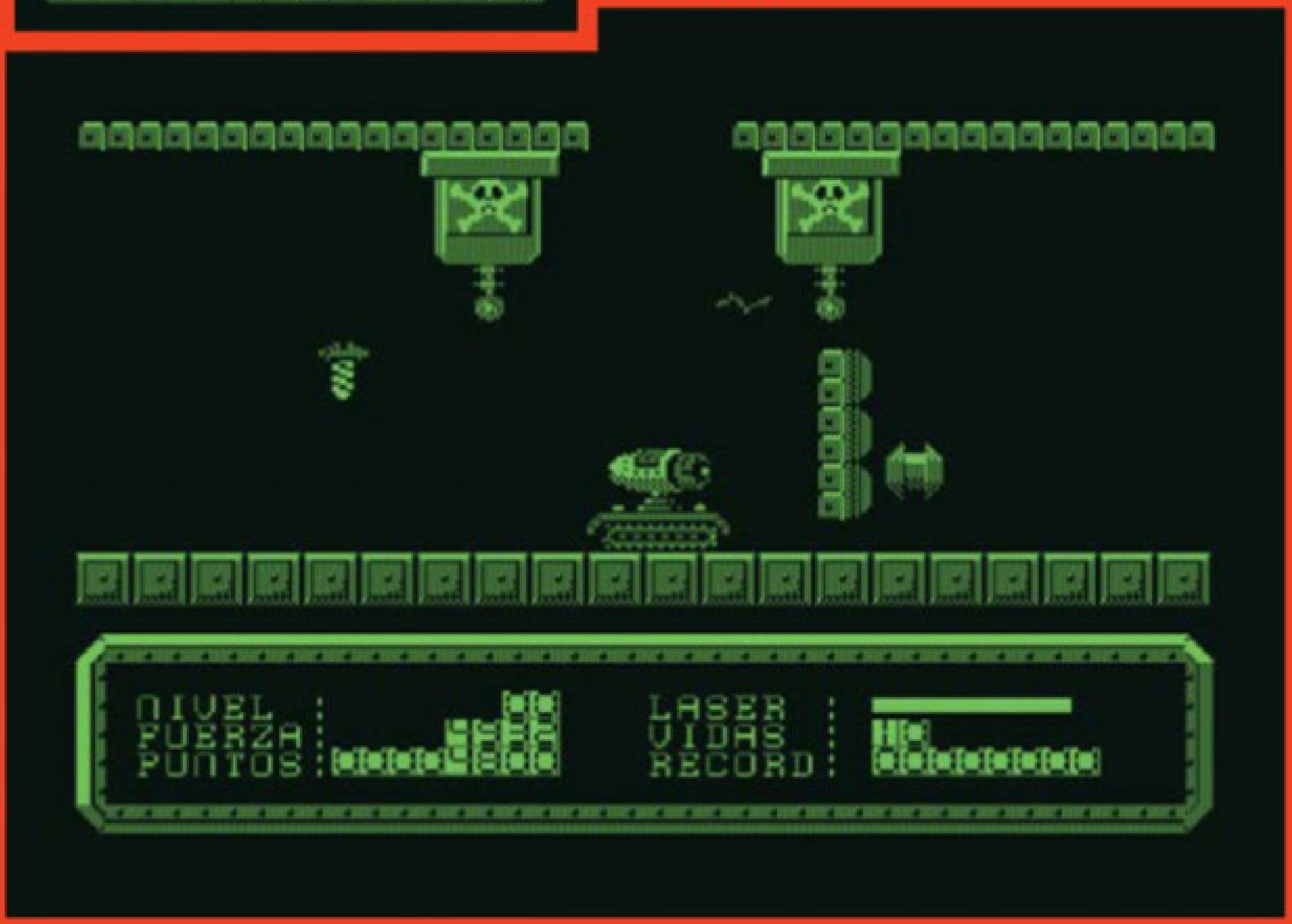
■ **The PCW was popular across Europe, particularly in France and Spain.** Spanish developer Opera Soft targeted the machine and released PCW versions of many of its titles. Unfortunately they were straight Z80 ports, with little effort to optimise the code for the PCW's display. As a result, otherwise decent games like *Mythos* and *Mutan Zone* suffer from some jerky scrolling and messy presentation.

The Last Mission avoids these problems thanks to the game's design. It's flick-screen so scrolling is not an issue, and the backgrounds are largely blank so it's clear to see what's going on. It's also a damned good game that deftly mixes exploration and blasting. You control a wheeled robot with a gun turret that you can detach and fly independently. Puzzles generally involve using the turret to clear a path for the robot so that it can escape from an underground base and save humanity or something. The whole game has a fluid, Ultimate feel to it, lacking the clunkiness that hampers a lot of PCW games. It does have an obvious problem though. Like all Opera Soft titles (and it seems Spanish games in general), the difficulty level is severe. If this was an Xbox game you'd probably get an Achievement for successfully navigating the first six screens. So not a game you'd complete in a hurry, or indeed ever, but if you're the determined sort then this is one of the finest arcade-style games available for the PCW.



» [Amstrad PCW] The turret goes searching for a solution. Keep a close eye on its fuel counter.

» [Amstrad PCW] The game's first hurdle. How do you pass this barrier?



» LAST NINJA II

■ DEVELOPER: SYSTEM 3 ■ YEAR: 1988

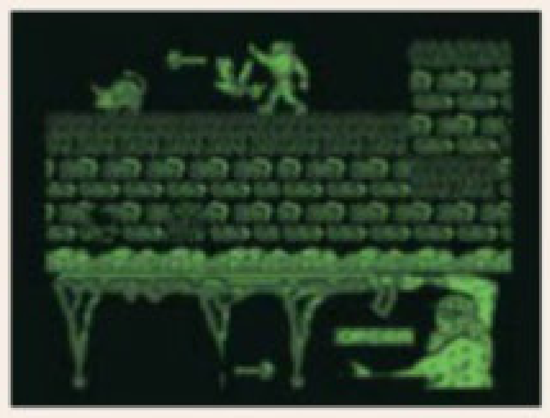
■ The best of the *Last Ninja* games made its way to the PCW courtesy of Mev Dinc. Fiddly controls cannot detract from this isometric adventure that deserves its classic status.

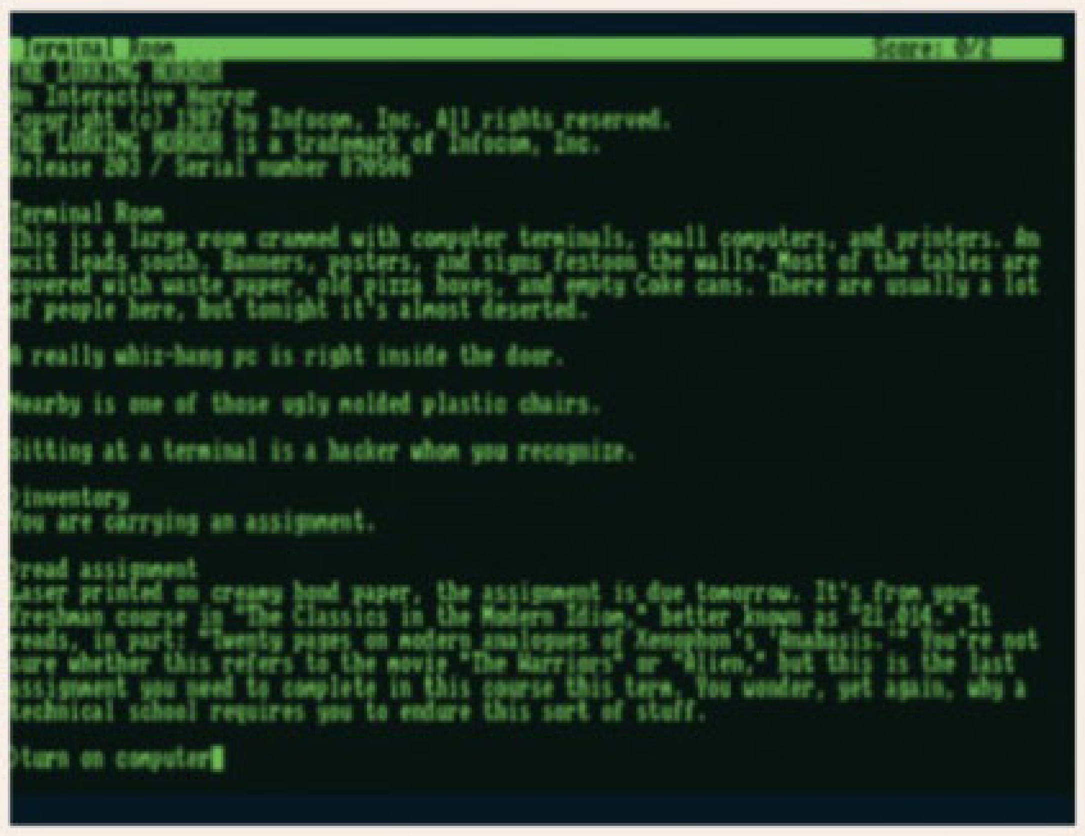


» ULISES

■ DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ Another bonkers effort from Opera Soft. This one's a bit like arcade game *Rastan*, with you running along smashing mythical beasts to bits. Ridiculously tough but never boring.

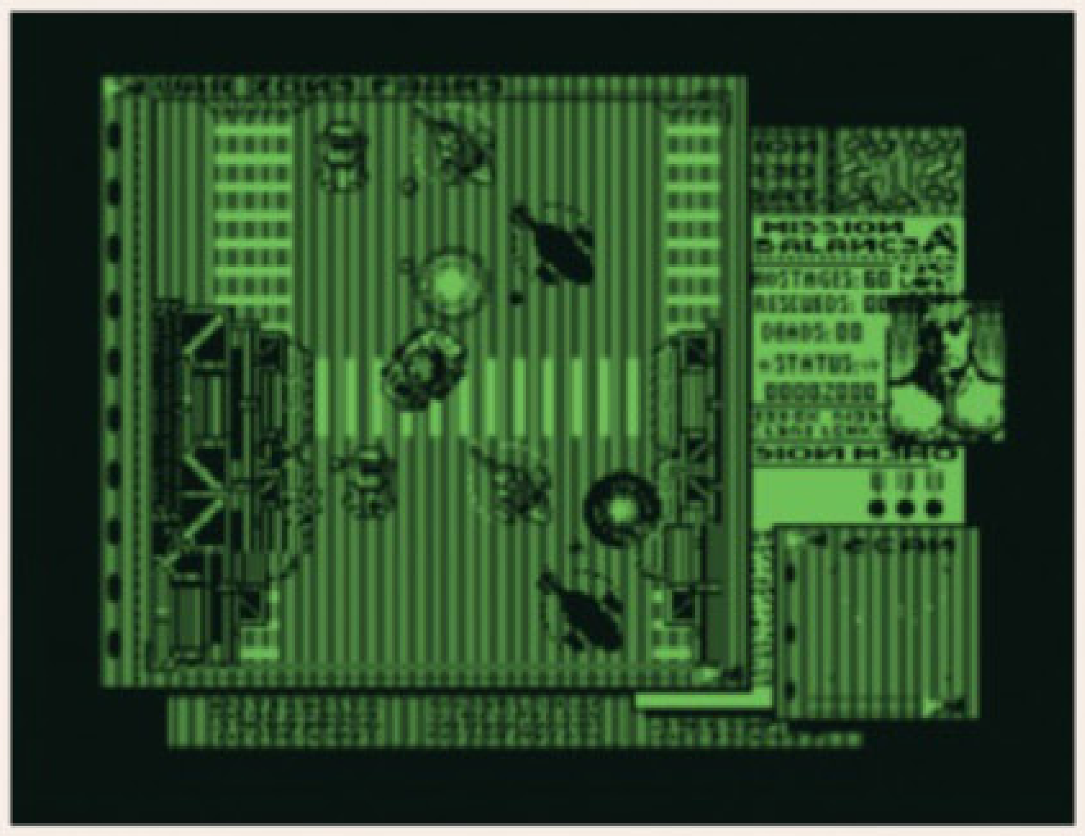




» THE LURKING HORROR

■ DEVELOPER: INFOCOM ■ YEAR: 1987

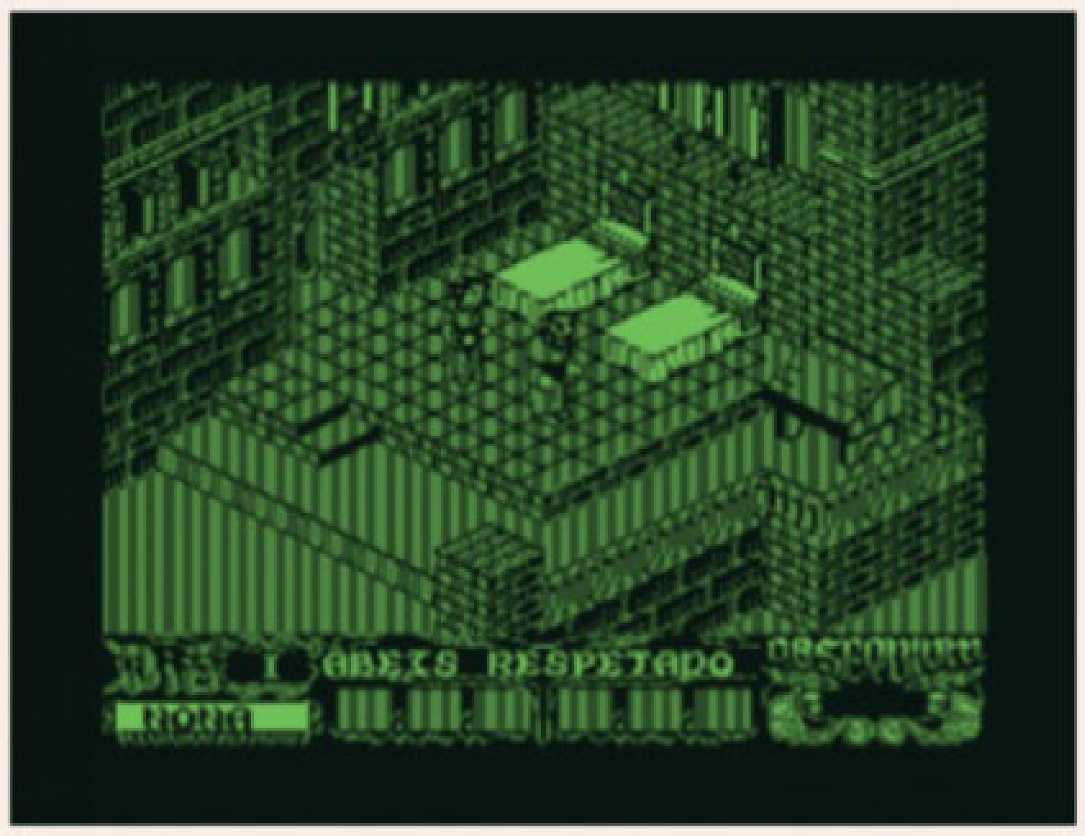
■ **Infocom was the** most prolific publisher on the PCW, with many of its adventure games available for the machine. Some classics are missing, but the firm's most famous titles were released including *Enchanter*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, the original *Zork* trilogy and this, *The Lurking Horror*, one of the best horror games ever made. You play a college kid who visits the campus computer lab during a snowstorm to finish off an assignment. During the night, as the storm builds outside, something evil stirs beneath the building. Like the best scary stories, this Lovecraft-inspired tale is fun and frightening in equal measure.



» SOVIET

■ DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **When the PCW** was being designed, Amstrad's boffins in Brentwood would have never imagined software like this running on their hardware. It was, after all, designed for office applications not scrolling shooters like *Soviet*. The game employs a top-down view and plays like a *Grand Theft Auto* prototype, with buildings made up of layers that shift as the viewpoint moves (a clever trick that's very similar to the top-down stages in Sega's *Thunderblade*). You drive around the streets, shooting enemy vehicles while attempting to rescue civilians. The gameplay is all over the place but it serves as a fine example of what's possible on the PCW.



» LA ABADIA DEL CRIMEN

■ DEVELOPER: HABISOFT ■ YEAR: 2012

■ **Opera Soft released** loads of games on the PCW, so it's really odd that its finest title, the murder mystery *La Abadia Del Crimen* (The Abbey Of Crime), never appeared on the platform. Or at least it didn't back in the day, because the game has since been ported from the CPC to the PCW by homebrewer Habisoft. This sterling effort shows that the game works really well on the PCW, with the graphics leaping off the screen and bringing the abbey to life. Ideally you need to convert the game to disk and play on a proper PCW, although it's definitely worth a look on PC using the PCW emulator CP/M Box (also by Habisoft).



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Super Turrican

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** FACTOR 5 » **RELEASED:** 1993

It wasn't always easy seeing your home computer favourites converted to consoles in the Nineties. Some conversions were just plain bad, and even the best ones tended to miss certain bits – *Speedball 2* might have played well on the Mega Drive, but the lack of "ice cream!" shouts left Amiga owners feeling that something was missing. *Super Turrican*, however, was a rarer beast. Not content with simply porting an existing game to the SNES, the team gathered the best elements of the series so far.

When *Turrican* veterans reached the first boss and a familiar iron fist hovered into view, those worries flared up again. Surely this tiny thing wasn't the best the developers could do? As it quickly transpired, it wasn't. The fist scaled to fill most of the screen, before shrinking down to a regular size and commencing attack. While its patterns were standard fare, the sight of the giant fist rotating to punch the ground was all the proof you needed that Factor 5 had taken good care of *Turrican* – and taken advantage of the host hardware. *

BIO

When Factor 5 took on the daunting job of bringing Manfred Trenz's masterwork to the SNES, it approached the project as a kind of greatest hits compilation. *Super Turrican* brought together level themes from the first two games in the series while adding a couple of new ones of its own. The game also included a new freeze beam attack which replaced the staple lightning whip and was capable of halting enemies temporarily. Factor 5 would go on to develop *Super Turrican 2*, which would become the last of the official *Turrican* games as later efforts fell by the wayside.



MORE CLASSIC SUPER TURRICAN MOMENTS

Rock Hard



When the screen locks in place and stone rain begins to fall, it's time to demonstrate your agility. Not only does the assault follow you, but the rocks split into two as they land, widening the potential hit area. The shower might only last 20 seconds, but it's hard to get through without taking a hit – we'd advise rolling as much as you can.

Playing The Angles



While the reflector shot isn't new, the carnage it can cause is always thrilling. With the right combination of positioning and geometry, you can hit any point on the screen, enabling you to take out dangerous enemies from positions of safety. But as satisfying as that is, it's more fun to indiscriminately fill the screen with bullets and watch things blow up.

Crush Hour



No, that's not a claustrophobic delusion – the walls really are closing in on you. It's a race against time as you hop from platform to platform, with diamonds placed tantalisingly on the central footholds to lure you from the safe routes. Eventually though, you'll be hopping up one or the other as it's impossible to escape with much time to spare.

Heart Of The Alien



The alien setting of the final stages is clearly inspired by the work of HR Giger and is oozing with details, such as the pulsating background and salivating aliens. But it's the horror of the biomechanical train that lingers in the memory – you'll need to dodge barriers and shoot aliens, while watching out for fires and gaps between the carriages.



» Basking in the sun at Portobello Road – Ian Mathias, Dave Chapman, Alex Martin, Max? (hidden), Lincoln Tomlin, Martin Wheeler and Andy Green

GANG LEADERS

A GANG OF FIVE RETROSPECTIVE

A haunted office, publicity stunts, a British comic book hero, Japanese paintings and a poem about the futility of war – these are all part of the story of Virgin's Gang Of Five, as Andrew Fisher discovers...

Nick Alexander left Thorn EMI to start Virgin Games in 1982, sharing Portobello Road offices with Richard Branson's growing empire. Submissions rolled in and the PR machine went into overdrive. The Virgin Games story appeared in issues 84 and 85, but we begin in 1983. Nick remembers, "The market was changing rapidly and whilst we were able to attract the odd fabulous title – *Falcon Patrol* from Steve Lee – amateur programmers were being left behind very rapidly. Establishing a studio of our own was the obvious way forward. My background was the music business not development, and that was our greatest weakness at launch. The Stampers' first Ultimate Play The Game product came out at the same time, which made everything else look rubbish, especially *Sheep Walk*."

The development team formed around technical manager Steve Webb and Patricia Mitchell – Nick's colleague at Thorn EMI. Patricia says, "Nick invited me to come on board to be Virgin's first female games programmer! I was interviewed for the job by Steve in the Earl of Lonsdale pub, we drank so much I mentioned the pattern on the carpet was moving. We definitely bonded and the next day I was told I had the



» Richard Branson and daughter Holly meet Nick Alexander and programmers at a launch event for Virgin Games.

IN THE KNOW

■ Founding members were Dave Chapman (programming), Ian Mathias (artist), Patricia Mitchell (PR & evaluation), Steve Webb (technical manager) and Andy Wilson (programming). Chris Blackwell (then head of Island Records) composed music for Virgin titles, turned into actual code by the programmers.

■ The scrolling message on C64 *Rebel* says, "The Gang Of Five is currently up to eight which just goes to show that figures can be twisted any which way. This game was written without the aid of air conditioning in a room with temperatures exceeding warm. Two programmers melted and one designer spontaneously combusted leaving nasty stains on the carpet and a rather large cleaning bill."

■ The team moved offices in 1986. "We were sure Vernon Yard was haunted. A couple of people saw a figure at the window as they walked down the alleyway that led to the building only to find there was no one there and they were the first to open up. We then heard someone who had formerly lived in the building had hanged himself on one of the beams near the window," says Patricia.

job. But what a hangover!" Her role soon changed. "In reality I spent a lot of the day looking at incoming games submissions. We sometimes had as many as 20 games a week arriving in a postbag in 1984 when I started. The quality was often not great, but there were a few gems. The idea of the in-house team was to up the quality. The manager at the time thought it was too distracting to have me in the same room as the male programmers, he said they would be too busy looking at the games I was reviewing (to this day I am not sure if I believe that reason!). This left me a little isolated in a room full of lively Virgin Video people."

Andy Wilson and Dave Chapman brought programming skills to the team, and artist Ian Mathias was responsible for graphics across different formats. That made five – where did the name come from? Patricia says, "Four Chinese Communist Party leaders were known as the Gang Of Four. There was a trial in the early Eighties and it was very topical. That is where Nick got the inspiration for Gang Of Five."

Martin Wheeler started work on *Sorcery* for the Spectrum on Christmas Day 1983, and it was a hit. The Gang transferred it to other formats, with Dave Chapman insisting to Nick an Amstrad version would sell. Dave says, "In 1984 I saw an advert in the back of a magazine. Virgin Games were recruiting for their first in-house team. The game I'd had published [*Sam Spade* by Silversoft] and others I'd been working on went down well at the interview and it wasn't long before I'd got the job, left home and headed off to London. To start with we had to get some art tools up and running for Ian to use, we even included luxurious features such as being able to use a joystick to move the cursor around, we really spoilt him. It's amazing that we managed to produce anything in those days given that everything we did ended up on cassette or microdrives."

Sorcery was followed by the enhanced *Sorcery+*, and the Gang moved into the spotlight. "*Sorcery* for the Amstrad CPC won just about every award from all the Amstrad magazines," says Dave. "I'm sure many other developers knew about us from that, but there weren't many opportunities to get together with them. Within a couple of years we got online with Prestel, Micronet and Compunet. This gave us more contact with developers and the public, it was on Compunet where we found audio demos by The Mighty Bogg (Graham Marsh) who went on to create the *Dan Dare* music for us. Back then we released the game when it was done and we were happy with it, one of the advantages of the developers, publishers and marketing being in adjacent rooms. I do have a bad memory of being photographed in a pointy hat alongside a rubber bat to promote *Sorcery*." ▶

"The Gang Of Five did some innovative work. I'm proud of Strangeloop"
SIMON BIRRELL





» 16-year old Simon Birrell demonstrates his BBC game *Bug Bomb* to Richard Branson.



» [ZX Spectrum] If you go down to the woods today, Martin Wheeler's *Sorcery* will drain your energy…


» Dave Chapman working his magic on the Amstrad version of *Sorcery*.

TIMELINE

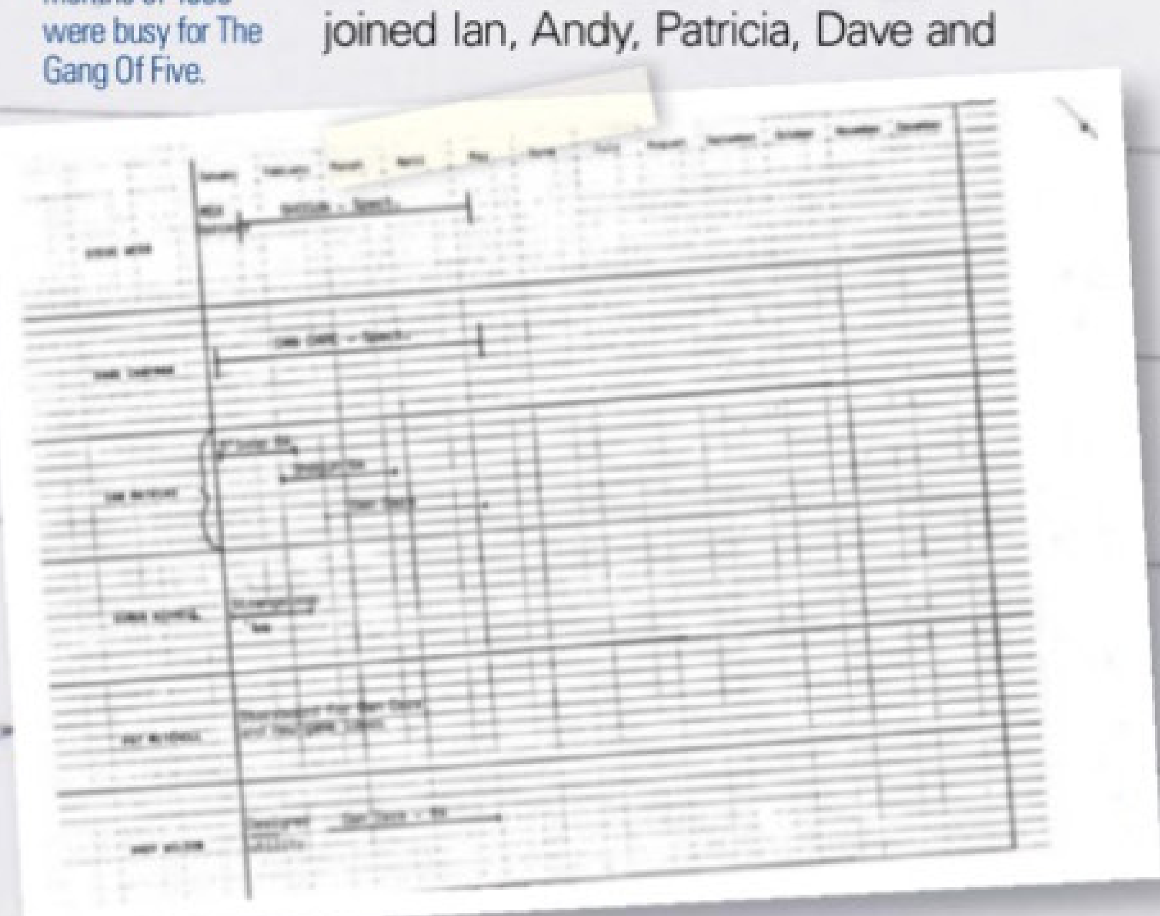
- **1982** VIRGIN GAMES STARTS AS A PUBLISHER, WITH NICK ALEXANDER RUNNING THE BUSINESS.
- **1983** THE FIRST WAVE OF VIRGIN-PUBLISHED GAMES IS POORLY RECEIVED, PROMPTING PRICE CUTS AND RECRUITMENT FOR AN IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM.
- **1984** VIRGIN ACQUIRES RABBIT SOFTWARE AND USES THE LABEL FOR BUDGET PRICE RELEASES. SORCERY AND STRANGELOOP BECOME THE FIRST GANG OF FIVE PRODUCTS. SAVE THE HIPPIE IS CANCELLED AND PATRICIA MITCHELL SWITCHES TO PRODUCT EVALUATION AND PR DUTIES.
- **1985** THE ENHANCED SORCERY+ IS LAUNCHED FOR THE AMSTRAD CPC.
- **1986** THE DAN DARE LICENCE RESULTS IN A WELL-RECEIVED GAME. THE LEISURE GENIUS LABEL IS TAKEN OVER, AND WITH NEW MANAGEMENT IN PLACE STEVE WEBB LEAVES VIRGIN.
- **1987** VIRGIN BUYS A 45 PER CENT STAKE IN MASTERTRONIC, WHILE GANG OF FIVE CREATES REBEL, TOY LICENCE ACTION FORCE AND HELPS ON COMPUTER SCRABBLE DELUXE.
- **1988** THE SEQUEL TO DAN DARE IS LAUNCHED, AND VIRGIN COMPLETES ITS TAKE-OVER OF MASTERTRONIC. AMIGA AND ATARI ST VERSIONS OF SORCERY+ ARE LAUNCHED, AS WELL AS THE SPECTRUM EXCLUSIVE ACTION FORCE II. PATRICIA MITCHELL, SIMON BIRRELL AND ANDY WILSON LEAVE VIRGIN FOR PALACE SOFTWARE AND DAVE CHAPMAN GOES FREELANCE.
- **1989** THE BOARD GAME CONVERSION RISK MARKS THE LAST OFFICIAL GANG OF FIVE PRODUCTION.

Strangeloop was the brainchild of Charles Goodwin. "I think I sent Virgin a game and they offered me a job, but it's all a bit hazy now. I took voluntary redundancy from STC [Standard Telephones & Cables] around 1984, and went to work at Virgin full-time rather than writing games in my spare time. I had the idea for a huge map based on a pseudo-random number generator, which enabled me to put a ridiculous number of rooms in (for the times)." The Gang then converted *Strangeloop* from Spectrum to multiple formats.

Simon Birrell was 16 when he sold Virgin his first BBC game *Bug Bomb*. "At the time, Virgin had the absurd idea that we were going to be the Eighties equivalent of rock stars, and so they'd hired promoter Tony Brainsby and his assistant Magenta DeVine to try to make us famous. The launch party was amazing, on the Kensington Rooftop Gardens. I met Richard Branson, and we were photographed together as he pretended to play my game." Simon took a year off before university. "I joined Ian, Andy, Patricia, Dave and Steve at the grotty Portobello Road office and was an unofficial sixth member for around nine months. I was a little in awe of them – they were in their 20s and I was just 18. That age difference seemed huge. I remember being very impressed that they actually had an artist, Ian Mathias, dedicated to doing graphics. That had never occurred to me! Ian and Andy were funny and great storytellers. Dave and Steve were much quieter, and tended to focus on the keyboard. Patricia and I are still good friends to this day."

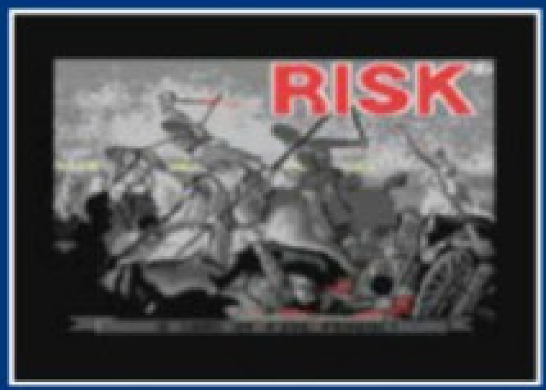
"I do have a bad memory of being photographed in a pointy hat alongside a rubber bat"
DAVE CHAPMAN, ON PROMOTING SORCERY

» The first few months of 1985 were busy for The Gang Of Five.



On his first day Simon was told to start converting *Strangeloop* to the C64. "There was no concept of porting a game yet and I never saw the original code. I simply played it for a while and started writing my own version. I considered copying the 250-room map which I had been given on a poster, but instead wrote a map editor and put Patricia to work on designing a brand new space station. It wasn't until a month or so after starting work that I met Charles, and we became friends. I asked him about his map editor and he told me he didn't have one. He'd created the map by magic by interpreting

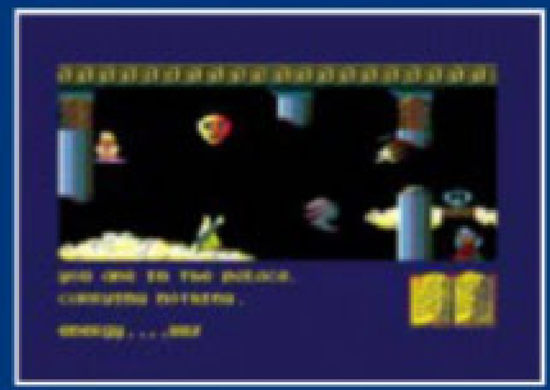
THE DNA OF... THE GANG OF FIVE



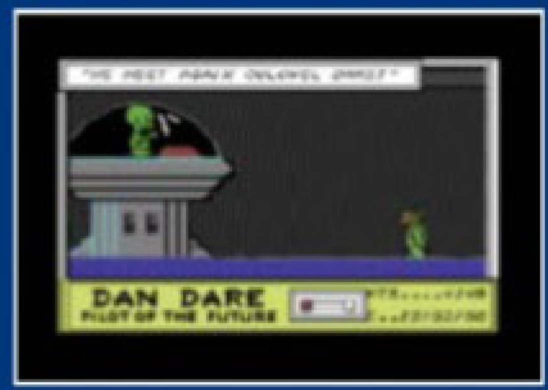
Genre-Crossing
The Gang Of Five was not afraid to try out different genres. Often games would mix elements to create something unique. The team worked with Leisure Genius on versions of board games *Scrabble*, *Cluedo*, *Monopoly* and *Risk*.



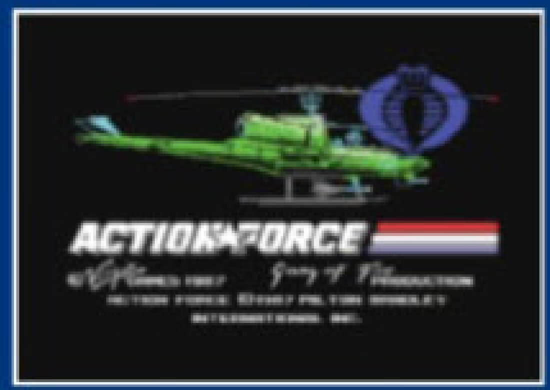
Hardware
Gang Of Five games appeared on several different gaming formats of the time, starting with the big three 8-bit machines. The team also worked on games for the Amstrad PCW, Macintosh, MSX and the French-built Thomson.



Critical Acclaim
After Virgin's early games reviewed poorly, the new wave of in-house titles helped build the company's reputation. Among the awards the Gang gained were *ZZAP!* Sizzlers, a *Crash!* Smash and a *Commodore User* Screen Star.



Adabtability
Playing to the strength of a machine gave developers a better end product than trying to create something a machine could not handle. The Gang chose different approaches for *Dan Dare*, *Rebel* and *Action Force* depending on the host machine.



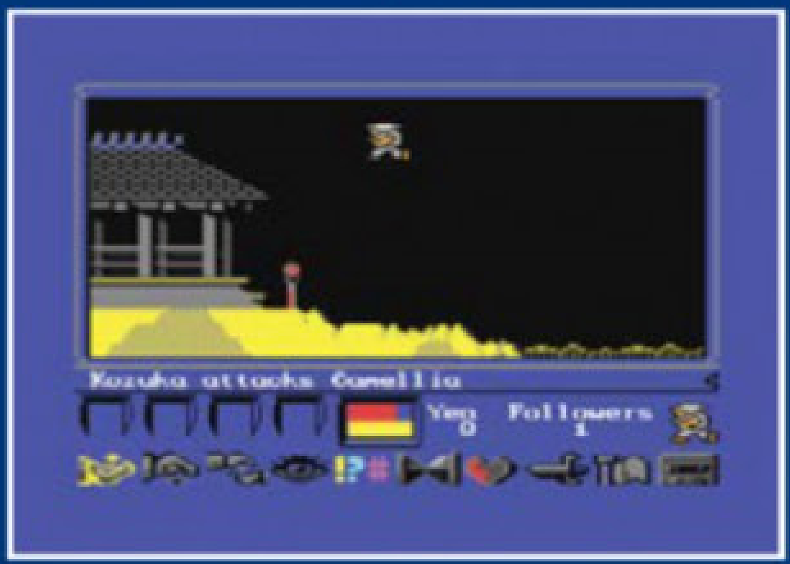
Licensing
Whether it was the crazy comic book antics of *Dan Dare* or the plentiful plastic toys of Mattel's *Action Force*, The Gang Of Five was very comfortable with licensed products – an increasingly important area for the industry at the time.


» Promoting the relaunched Rabbit Games budget label – Ian Mathias, Brynn Gilmore, Nick Alexander and Patricia Mitchell.

MEANWHILE, IN JAPAN...

Shogun was not an official Gang Of Five product, but Simon Birrell, Ian Mathias and Charles Goodwin all worked alongside programmer Steve Lee (*Falcon Patrol*, *Erebus*) to create this unusual game based on James Clavell's novel. English sailor James Blackthorne is stranded in 17th Century Japan and befriends several key historical figures. Ian Mathias's graphics were influenced by ukiyo-e (floating-world) artwork of the Edo period.

The player chose one of 40 characters from different classes – lord, samurai, peasant or Blackthorne himself – and must become Shogun by recruiting followers, collecting ceremonial objects and defeating AI opponents. Collecting items helped the player survive fights and befriend followers. The characters 'fly' across detailed scenery in a manner similar to *Sorcery*, with icon controls at the bottom of the screen used to manipulate objects, fight with an on-screen opponent and give orders.



the bytes of the Spectrum operating system in a special way and using them to generate a map. I was devastated by this news – the idea was brilliant and I'd just wasted two months writing a map editor. For my version, I was heavily influenced by the movie *Dark Star*, in the music, the ambience and humour."

Patricia had other design input. "I came up with a game design to expand on Martin's brilliant *Sorcery* (written in BASIC, an early hit on Spectrum). I worked with Dave on ideas for a version for the new Amstrad computer that had great hardware for gaming, and, with Ian's graphics, it was one of the top Amstrad games ever sold," says Patricia. When her game *Save The Hippie* was cancelled, she concentrated on game promotion. "Nick said I should take over all the copy writing, including the advertising blurb as well as the mechanical instructions and would I like to learn about marketing as well. Overseeing some development came later. There was a decent marketing team and it made sense to push more titles, including those from some of the original Virgin programmers."

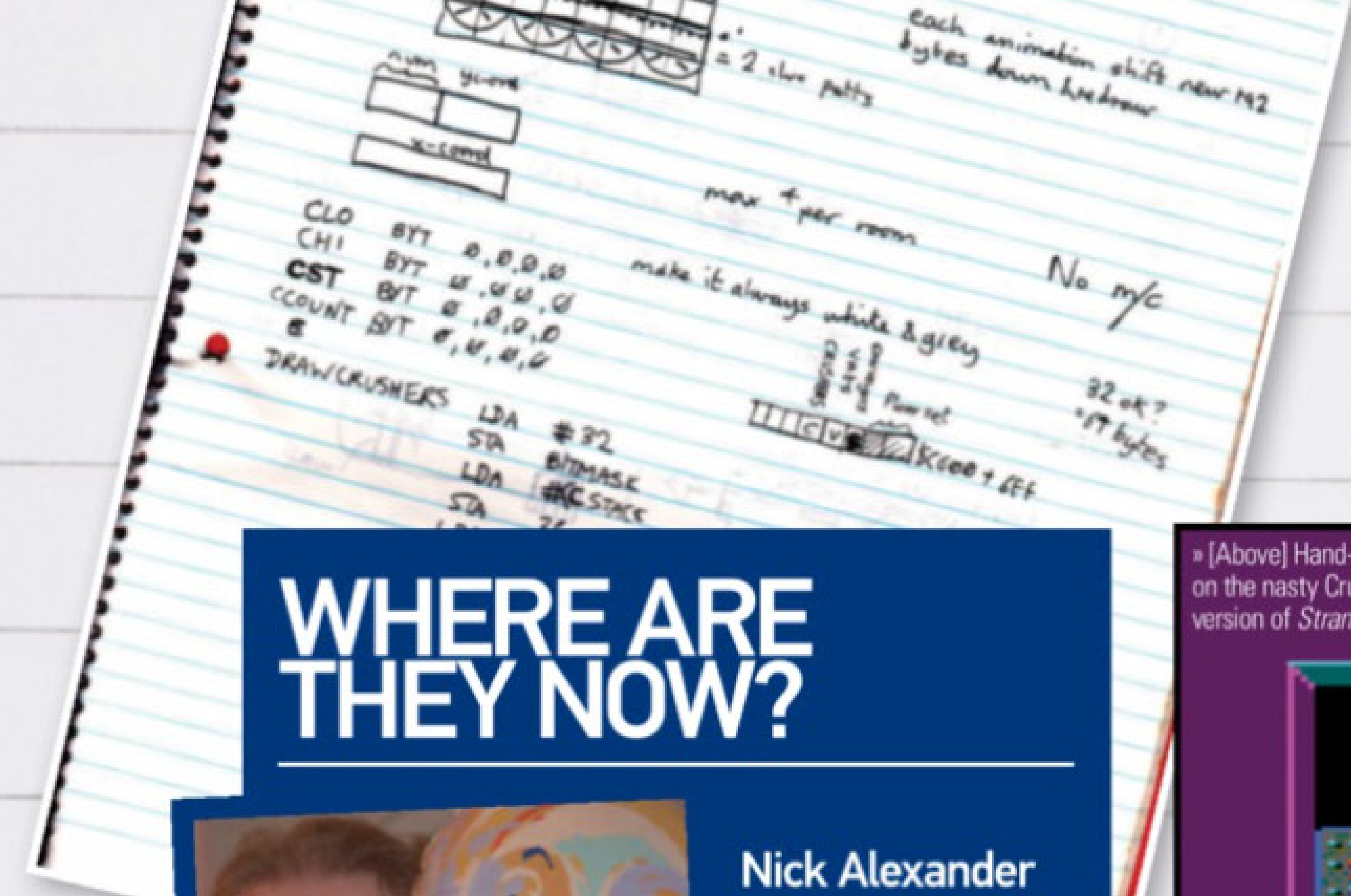
Nick's involvement was limited. "I was multitasking – as marketing director of the nascent Virgin Atlantic Airways, and MD of the Design Clinic – so was not around as much as I should have been. The Gang was buried in a vault where the light of day never reached. Despite or because of that they were extremely focused and diligent. I remember being appalled when I came in one day to find they were torturing the Little Computer People by starving them. I was surprisingly upset and vehement about looking after them better."

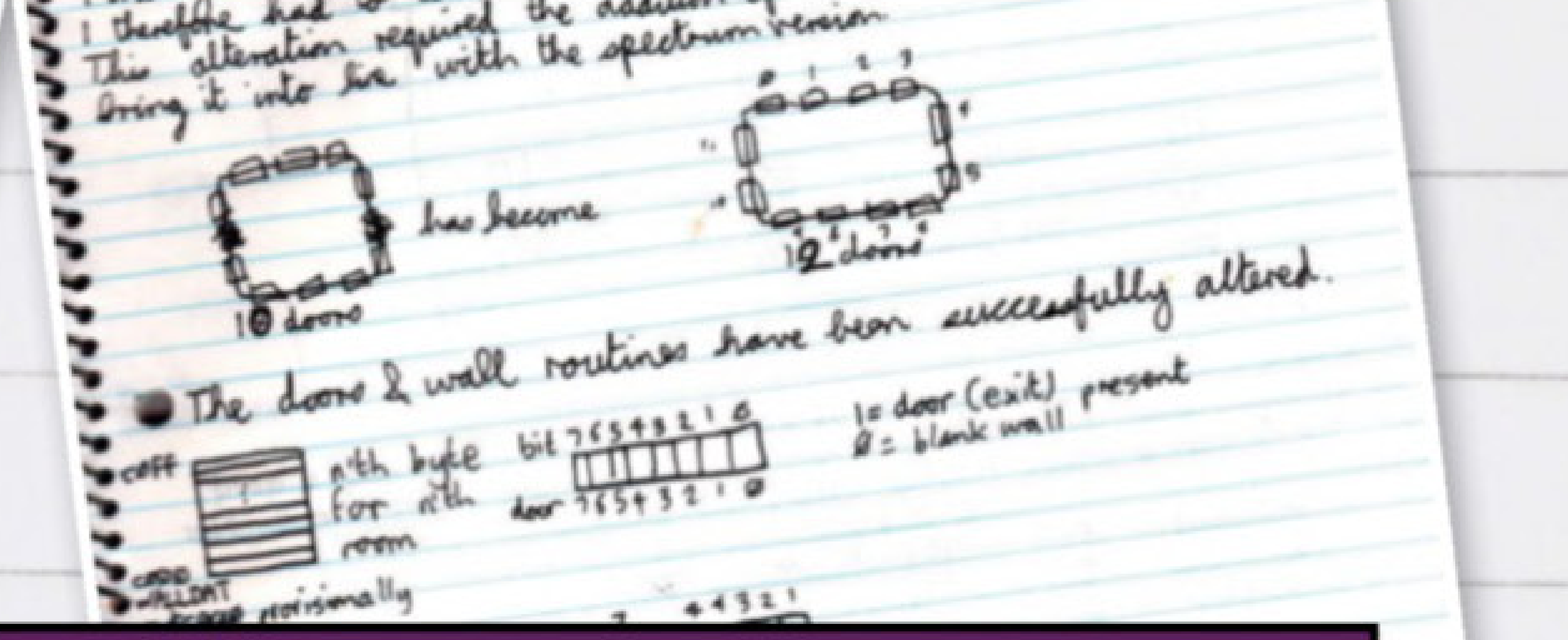
The high point was *Dan Dare* (see issue 73's Making Of article). Nick explains, "As the industry started to mature and marketing became more important in getting your product noticed, the role of licences became obvious. At Thorn EMI we were already looking at movie licences but the movie industry had unrealistic views on what they were worth to us. With a licence the quality of the product is even more important but the marketing is easier." *Dan Dare* was a favourite of Dave's too. "We were enjoying what we were doing and so was everyone else. We even got to meet Alan Sugar and were featured in the *Dan Dare* Annual, what more could we ask for?"


» [ZX Spectrum] Shoot the US flags to regain energy in *Action Force 2*, a Spectrum exclusive.



» [C64] Dan Dare presses the button to launch the giant laser; this sub-game inspired *Rebel*.





» [Above] Hand-written code and notes on the nasty Crushers from Simon Birrell's version of *Strangeloop*.



» [Amstrad] More action from the enhanced *Sorcery+*, distributed by Amsoft.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Nick Alexander

Left Virgin in 1991 to join Sega Europe. Nick later bought and ran Future Publishing before selling it on again. He stayed in the games industry, most recently as chairman of Tee Pee Games.

Patricia Mitchell



After Palace, Patricia worked at News International before joining Mirrorsoft. Next up was Sega Europe, working with Nick again. During the dotcom boom she teamed up with Simon Birrell in Madrid, before moving to LA in a variety of games industry roles. In recent years her speciality has been digital marketing.

Lincoln Tomlin

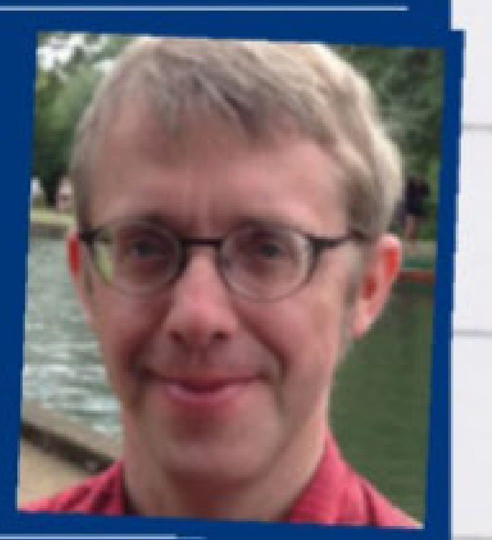
Moved to Source Software (NES/Atari) in Leeds, then lived in Canada working on hardware projects. He's now back in the UK living on a narrowboat.



Dave Chapman

Dave went freelance in 1988. In 1992 he joined the new Virgin team (rebranded Virgin Interactive Entertainment). Since 2006, Dave has been at Sumo Digital. "This is the longest I've stayed at a company but it's a good place with good people. I'm working on *Forza Horizon 2* for Xbox 360 alongside a few other old timers such as Peter Harrap and Tony Crowther – I was playing their games 30 years ago!"

Simon Birrell



In the Nineties Simon became CTO of a virtual reality company in Spain. In 1996 he founded Silicon Artists, an internet software and entertainment company. He's now running a start-up company doing lead generation in Brazil.

Ian Mathias

Ian remained at Virgin and became an important producer and manager of projects, working with outside developers.

Charles Goodwin

Charles left the games industry in 1990 due to low pay and long hours. After developing a PC game and a job with Gameloft in Auckland he quit the industry again.

Patricia admits, "It was a joy to work on *Dan Dare*, I got a telling off from Nick for printing too many posters and T-shirts (my partner in crime was sales manager Brynn Gilmore who was a huge fan) and overspending on the marketing budget. I really enjoyed writing the blurb for packaging, advertising and press releases, and working with designers to create the finished ads and packaging. At the time it was the Design Clinic that did the work for us, another Virgin company."

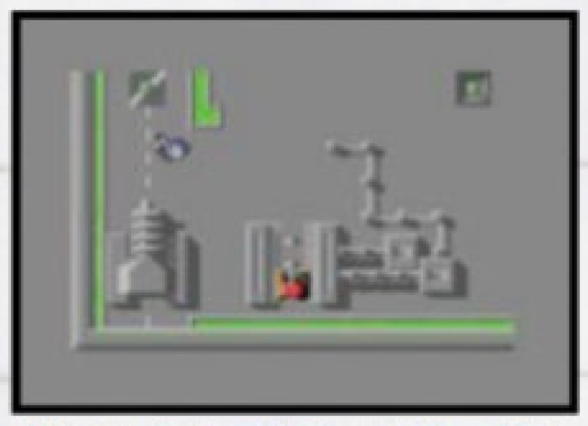
Shogun (see Meanwhile, In Japan) was Simon's next project. "This was the first time I had designed a game that I wasn't going to program, so naturally I was overambitious," says Simon. "The game was to be developed on C64 by Steve Lee and Amstrad by Charles Goodwin simultaneously, and we wanted to do a system with intelligent characters who would be playing the game themselves, even when off-screen. So you could give missions to characters and they would run off and perform them. It turned out to be a titanic development effort to fit in 64K which I missed, having swanned off back to university. Characters had to be able to navigate screens themselves. They needed strategies and basic AI. Charles suffered mightily to get the game finished according to the design, and I think Steve Lee actually left the industry after finishing his version. I'm not sure if players appreciated all the amazing programming that had gone into it."

However, the company was changing. "When we acquired Leisure Genius in 1986, it came with its own in-house team and senior developer management," says Nick. Steve Webb would leave Virgin shortly afterwards, marking the start of the Gang of Five breaking up. Dave remembers, "Steve left the company rather abruptly and the rest of us had to jump in and try to finish off Amstrad *Dan Dare*, which we managed to do but it was weird not having Steve around."

Arriving in 1986 was Lincoln Tomlin, his admirable Sinclair QL experience earning him a job converting *Scrabble*. "In retrospect, it was a struggle adapting to an office environment," says Lincoln. "Andy Green, who started alongside myself, was a fabulous programmer and all-round good chap. All very creative and talented people, it was the beginning of a very interesting period of my life. The more interesting projects involved knotty problems on hardware such as the Thomson (French computer with no English documentation), Amstrad PCW and the early Macintosh at assembly level." Lincoln would be responsible for Spectrum versions of *Rebel* and *Action Force*. "*Rebel* was squeezed into a pretty short time-frame and could have been a whole lot better. The play area was a window into a matrix that was being constantly updated. Indexing and updating matrices and table lists was the order of the day in character-based games back then. With a slick sprite routine overlaid and some effects the world was your lobster."

» Martin Wheeler and Lincoln Tomlin hard at work in the Eighties.





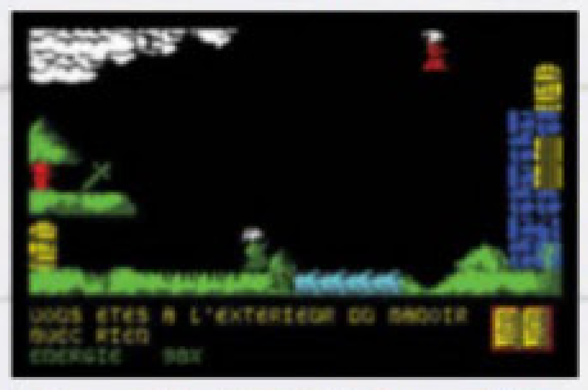
» [C64] The tank next to the giant laser at the start of *Rebel*, level one.



» [C64] *Risk*, with graphics by Nicole Baikaloff and programming by Tony Smith.



» [C64] Ian Mathias provided artwork and loading screens for many Virgin games.



» [Thomson] The French-built Thomson T07 computer got its own conversion of *Sorcery*.

Patricia reflects on being in the Gang. "There was a feeling of pulling together. I made friends there that I still see and am very fond of. It was exciting times, there was competition with other developers and publishing companies. It was a pioneering spirit, pushing the machines in the early days. It was also exciting being part of the mushrooming Virgin empire." Mentioning Virgin prompts Patricia to talk about the fun side. "I won't even start about the wild Virgin weekends away that had Richard Branson on stage in suspenders (still wearing his woolly jumper!). When we bought Rabbit Software we decided to do a PR photo dressed in rabbit suits. We were a sight to be seen and got some interesting catcalls walking along the Bayswater Road to Hyde Park."

Dave shares more memories. "We were very hands-on with other aspects of the business. There were many times where I'd jump on a train to take a cassette containing a finished game up to the CBS pressing plant who handled the duplication and distribution for us; or we'd head off to Olympia or Earls Court for a show where we'd build and set up the stand and then man it too. There was a pub near the office so when we weren't working we could often be found in there. That pub did well out of us, especially when they put in a *Gauntlet* machine." Lincoln recalls late night cigarettes lit precariously from the basement boiler, and the plans for another licensed product. "Andy's flow-chart for his implementation of *Scalextric* is, to this day, etched on my mind. It will have been accurate but resembled a Mutually Assured Destruction diagram from *Dr Strangelove* which had myself and John (Baldachin) in stitches."

"There was a feeling of pulling together. I made friends there that I still see"

PATRICIA MITCHELL

Simon says, "The Gang Of Five did some innovative work. I'm proud of *Strangeloop*. *Shogun* was 40 years ahead of it's time – one day it will be rediscovered! I also remember the marketing director, who was a fountain of dirty jokes and stories about his LSD experiences. I heard that a few years later he had a religious conversion and became a priest. Maybe the strain of working with the Gang was too much." Sharing offices with Virgin Records caused him an embarrasing moment. "Once I answered the phone and it was Dusty Springfield. Dusty who? I'd never heard of her and put her on hold. I got bawled out by the record company executive who wanted to fire me."

When Patricia left, Simon and Andy Wilson followed. "Matthew Timms at Palace gave me the chance to join as a producer and be involved with both the internal team working on 16-bit and the outside development groups," says Patricia. Dave Chapman left as well. "I found I wasn't working on the arcade-style games that I loved and was instead doing other things – such as getting *Scrabble* to work in German (they used eight tiles instead of seven), and putting fast tape loaders onto budget games. The company my girlfriend worked for was moving her office out of London so I decided to go with her (and we're still together 26 years later) and try my luck freelance." The last Gang Of Five production was 1989's *Risk*. Virgin Games reverted to being a publisher and the in-house development team disappeared until a new team formed in 1992. The Gang's lifespan was just five years but the team achieved a lot, building Virgin's reputation and creating memorable games. *

With many thanks to Simon, Dave, Lincoln, Nick and Patricia for supplying photos and images.

DEFINING GAMES



Strangeloop (Commodore 64)
Charles Goodwin's Spectrum game mixed puzzles with shooting action as the astronaut explored a space station. Simon says: "A Strange Loop is a sort of mathematical paradox. The book *Godel, Escher, Bach* was very popular amongst programmers back then, I suspect it came from there." His C64 version ended with a quote from Robert Southey's poem *The Battle Of Blenheim*, to illustrate the futility of playing videogames: "And everybody praised the Duke / Who this great fight did win." / "But what good came of it at last?" / Quoth little Peterkin. / "Why, that I cannot tell," said he, / "But 'twas a famous victory."



Sorcery+ (Amstrad CPC)
Sorcery by Martin Wheeler was converted by The Gang Of Five to several different formats. It is the later 'Plus' version developed for the Amstrad CPC (converted to the Amiga and Atari ST three years later) that gained positive reviews and is worth checking out, with its enhanced graphics and larger number of screens to conquer. The wizard must use various objects and weapons (only one can be held at a time) to free the sorcerers being held captive, moving between the screens via a series of little doors. The finale of the enhanced game was a battle against the evil Necromancer.



Dan Dare II (Commodore 64)
The original *Dan Dare* recreated the look of a comic book with panels and speech bubbles. The Spectrum and C64 versions played differently, working with each machine's strengths; the C64 had more dialogue and the famous laser beam sub-game, where the Spectrum concentrated on platform action and collecting keys. The arcade-oriented sequel gave players the option of being either Dan Dare or the Mekon, tasked with destroying or releasing the Super Treens being bred on a spaceship. Both games have detailed graphics and good control methods, receiving high praise from the magazines.



Rebel (Commodore 64)
Ian Mathias suggested expanding the Commodore 64's laser beam sub-game from *Dan Dare* into a full title. Inspired by George Lucas's *THX 1138*, the plot saw an agricultural worker steal a tank and break free – using mirrors to reflect the beam from a large generator to break down security doors. The C64 version had a variety of vicious enemies that attacked regularly, steadily reducing the abilities of the protagonist's tank until it is eventually repaired in the garage. The Spectrum version was more of a pure puzzle game, with no shooting mechanics and the player racing a countdown timer.

MONSTER MAX


DOT MATRIX WITH STEREO SOUND
BATTERY
PLAYPEN
Nintendo GAME BOY™
B
SELECT
START
PHONES

After the acclaimed Batman and Head Over Heels wowed Spectrum owners, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond took their isometric magic to the Game Boy. Craig Grannell interviews the pair about working on the new platform, rethinking design for handhelds, and their publisher's baffling decision to scupper the game's chances of success

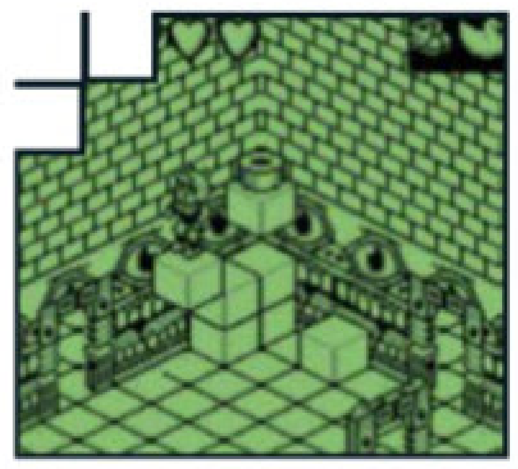
With two Ultimate-style Spectrum hits – *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* – under his belt, perhaps it was fate Jon Ritman would eventually find himself working with Ultimate successor company Rare. He recalls reading a magazine article about the company looking for new talent, and then visiting and it not even crossing his mind they wouldn't want to work with him. "It must have been quite arrogant of me at the time, but we did have a laugh about it later, and I had plenty of late-night conversations with Chris Stamper, when we both did our best work," says Jon.

Much of his time was spent working on a development system, and when that was finished, Jon figured he'd like to make a game with it himself. "I decided to work on the Game Boy, which seemed like a fun console, and decided on an isometric adventure because I'd not seen that at the time on the platform," says Jon, reasoning that games to that point had perhaps been driven in a certain direction by hardware. "Remember, I'd learned my trade working on a pretty open-ended ZX Spectrum, and I did what I wanted. The Game Boy came with the likes of hardware sprites, and if you make it easy for people to go down a certain route, of course they will. I thought it'd be good to buck the trend and try something different!"

The game he created would become *Monster Max*, an epic and visually striking isometric adventure packed full of puzzles, twice the size of *Head Over Heels*. Once again, Jon enlisted regular co-conspirator Bernie Drummond to work on the game's graphics. "Personally, I loved the isometric 3D format – it seemed more immersive than standard platform or top-down games," Bernie says, adding that with the Game Boy having a Z80-style chip and more memory than the Spectrum, Jon was able to "easily convert the isometric game format" to the tiny handheld. He adds that "the main worry was the screen size" and most of the duo's time was therefore spent drawing graphics, building the map and designing the rooms.

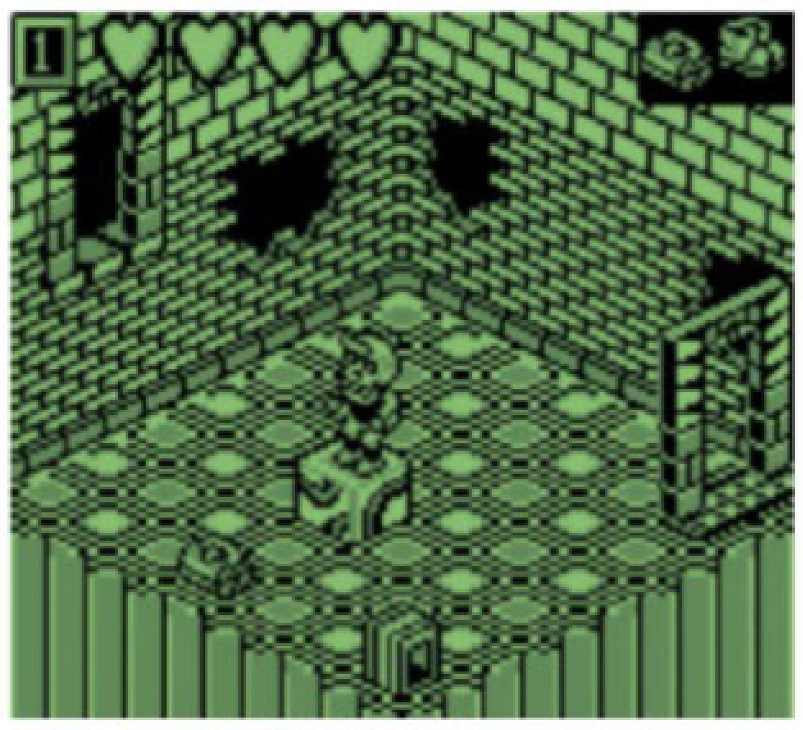
Jon's quick to point out it wasn't entirely plain sailing, however: "The engine was a complete rewrite, because the Game Boy chip is really a kind of 'Z80 lite', and the console clearly wasn't designed to do anything with a full high-res screen. It required some jiggery-pokery to make it do that, switching character sets two-thirds of the way down the screen, making use of careful timing." He adds that it was also a pain working with paged memory on the Game Boy, where you were constantly having to move memory in and out of usable space: "It could get quite difficult when you needed something to be available in different areas but you were using a different bit of paged memory. There was a lot of juggling involved to get everything working in *Monster Max*, because you didn't want to be paging memory in and out when you were in a room – it would have slowed things down. That said, at least I had the memory, which I didn't on the Spectrum, although it would have been nice to have also had a bit of colour!"

Still, in having to create a new engine, Jon was able to incorporate ideas that took the kind of isometric adventures he'd previously created to a new level. "I wanted rooms to be bigger than the screen, to manage rooms with different floor levels, and to have a new way of handling tools," he says. On that last point, he explains *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* had characters where abilities were essentially 'removed' ▶

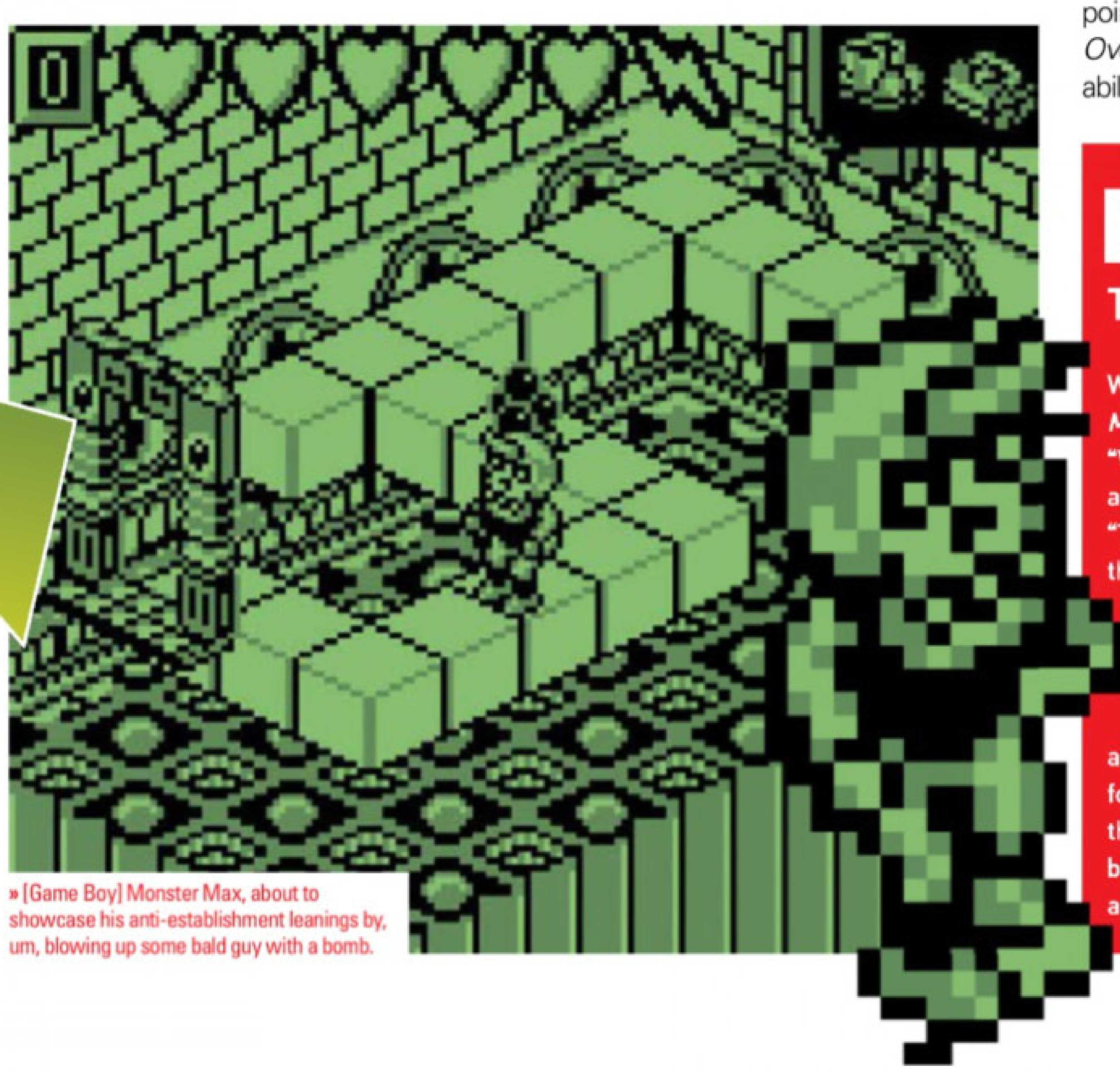


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** TITUS
- » **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PLATFORM:** GAME BOY
- » **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE



» [Game Boy] This floor is electric. Max, sadly, is not electrocution-proof.



» [Game Boy] Monster Max, about to showcase his anti-establishment leanings by, um, blowing up some bald guy with a bomb.

BUGGED OUT

The missed bug that led to a six-hour game session

When researching this feature, we discovered a 20-part complete walkthrough of *Monster Max* (youtube.com/watch?v=YsFYVlmKIMk) and asked Jon if he'd seen it. "Well, I had to do something like that myself, to submit the game to Nintendo," he says, adding that was "a nightmare" because the kit used was actually a converted NES. "The D-pad is different and it's far easier to accidentally change direction. This is why the game offers two control options, purely so I could make that bloody video, even though the alternative controls were entirely pointless on the Game Boy".

Still, he notes that the single-session playthrough that involved "six hours of play with my partner feeding me as I went," wasn't all for nothing, given that Nintendo found a bug – rare in a game by Jon, who always dealt with problems as they occurred, so he didn't build on top of them. "It was around the seventh level – for about three seconds, an icon flashed that shouldn't have. It was one of those bugs that when you find it, you wonder how it could ever have worked. But that was the only bug Nintendo found." Jon's reward: "It of course meant I had to fix it and then record another six-hour *Monster Max* session!"

▶ and earned back during play, whereupon they remained permanent. With *Monster Max*, he thought it would be interesting to force you to regularly let go of said abilities (jumping; ducking; a bag for collecting items; and many more) restricting the number you could use at once: "Two went nicely with the two main buttons on the Game Boy, although it did complicate the design. It was hard work ensuring you could always access the right tool, and to not create an arrangement of rooms where you'd accidentally put a tool down in the wrong position and not be able to get back to it. I had to be extremely careful with that, but I don't think I made any errors in the end."

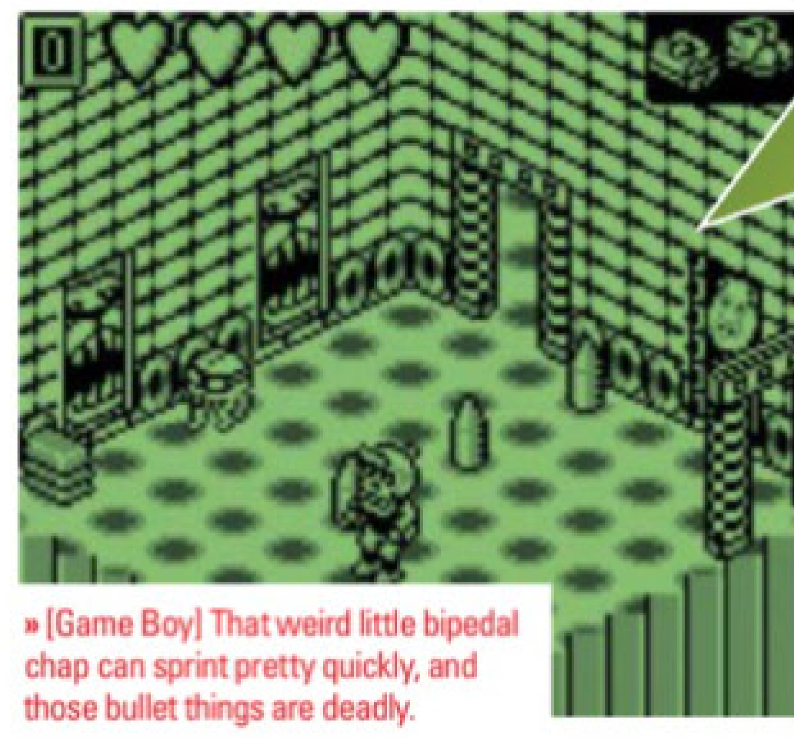
In terms of the game's theme, Bernie recalls the character of *Monster Max* was a case of the right place at the right time: "Jon and I hadn't worked together for a couple of years, and I'd reverted back to the highly colourful 'pen to paper' artwork I was used to. When Jon phoned and said we were going to make a game for the Game Boy, the guitar-playing half-skeleton/half-reptile Max was the latest creation I had to hand, although the small screen size meant the art was slightly compromised by the need to keep the visual clarity we were known for."

Otherwise, Bernie was again given the freedom to run riot – as he puts it, "drawing whatever looked good, with Jon then creating a narrative out of the images I gave him". Despite the size of the game, there was very little planning, with the pair pretty much making things up as they went along. "We'd have certain sizes of objects that we'd give nicknames to, such as 'sweets' and 'blocks', and I'd ask Bernie for 'five more sweets', he'd send ten, I'd chuck five away and see what was left," remembers Jon. "If they didn't work, I'd ask for more. Or sometimes Bernie would just send loads of stuff I'd think was brilliant and didn't know what to cut out." He notes the pair once more gained a reputation for having bizarre imaginations, primarily because objects were out of scale: "People said it was bizarre, but I just thought it was fun and we got better pictures in our games. There's a teapot in *Batman* that's half his size, but if it had been to scale, it would have been three pixels wide and looked like nothing at all. Instead, we got a beautiful teapot, and I carried on that line of thinking in *Monster Max*."

Despite the ad-hoc nature of *Monster Max*'s creation, Jon did carve out one very important rule to follow: "There was the idea there'd be three worlds on each level, but you'd only have to complete two to go up a



» [Game Boy] The lift guy charges for access to higher levels (credits are earned by completing missions). And, yes, you can blow him up using bombs.



» [Game Boy] That weird little bipedal chap can sprint pretty quickly, and those bullet things are deadly.

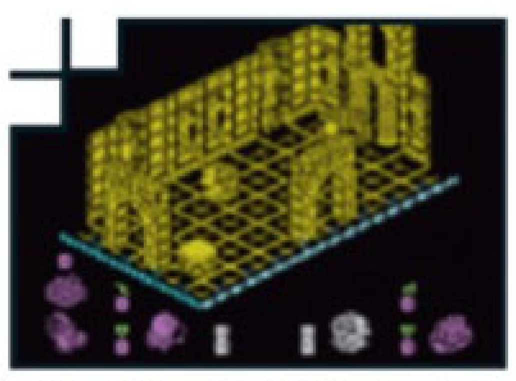


» [Game Boy] When you first collect an item, the game helpfully tells you what it's for.

level. It's always possible you'll create something someone can't do, and it's good to say there's an alternative." This all arose due to an assortment of people getting stuck fairly early on in *Batman*, and giving up despite having not experienced the majority of the game. "I was determined that would never happen again," confirms Jon. This revised structure in combination with a password system also dovetailed nicely with the idea of mobile play: "With the Game Boy, it might be something you'd use on the move, but *Head Over Heels* had to be completed in one go if you wanted to see the end. I liked the idea of a game being segmented into small chunks, where you could think 'I've done that bit' and could move on."

When we ask about specific memorable elements of *Monster Max*, though, it seems Jon himself has moved on – or at least his memory has. "When I first started making games, I was always of the opinion one of the greatest tools I could have would be an anti-memory pill. It would have wiped my memory of a game, so I could play it like anyone else, and not someone who knew it inside out. I could then really hone it," he says. "Of course, that wasn't available, but I discovered by trial and error that if you wait for ten or 12 years, that all sort of happens by itself. So I did go back and get that experience with *Monster Max*, playing it as if it was someone else's game, and I thought it was quite fun. Unfortunately, that was about ten years ago, and so I've more or less forgotten it again!"

Jon does at least recall that what you saw on the screen was entirely what he planned to put there, and that there's no kind of 'director's cut' waiting in the wings, on some lost development rig in a dusty cupboard: "When I was making a world in *Monster Max*, I was always trying it out room-by-room, and if I didn't like how something felt, it would be out." In a sense, this was also the first of Jon's isometric titles that was extremely reliant on his own tastes, given that wider playtesting was significantly harder than it had been on the Spectrum. "Previously, I'd had the opportunity to watch people play *Batman* and *Head*



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MATCH DAY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

BATMAN
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

HEAD OVER HEELS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987



» [Game Boy] No game is complete without a few boxes to navigate.



MORE RITMAN We select some of our personal favourites



NAMTIR RAIDERS
ZX81 (1982)

■ Like many early coders Jon's earliest game was based on the arcade games he had played. *Namtir Raiders* is an interesting take on the likes of *Space Invaders*. Oh, and if you're wondering where the name came from, it's just Ritman spelt backwards.



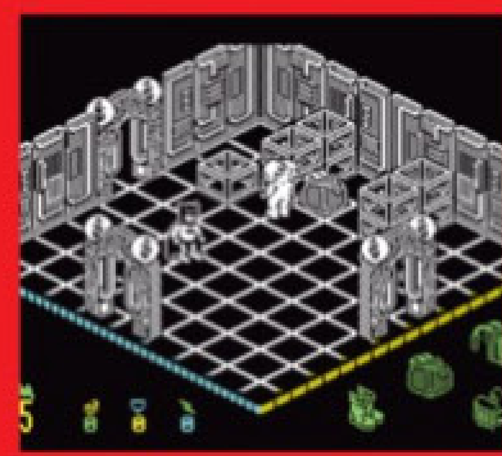
BEAR BOVVER
ZX SPECTRUM (1983)

■ Jon left his career at Radio Rentals so he could work on videogames full-time. The end result was this highly entertaining platform game for the Speccy that riffed on the gameplay of *Burger Time* after Jon had seen it running on the ColecoVision.



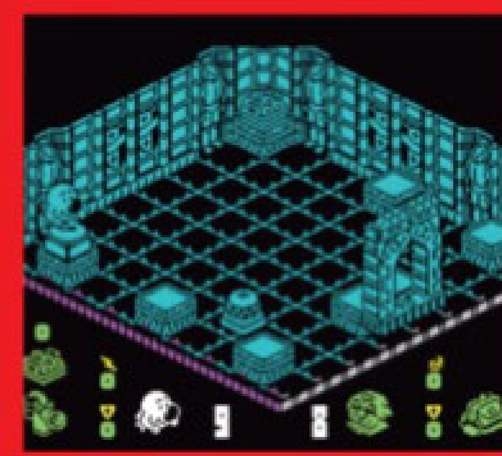
MATCH DAY
VARIOUS (1984)

■ *Match Day* was a great football game, made all the more surprising once you realise that Jon himself wasn't a big fan of the sport. Fast-paced and with some neat gameplay mechanics, it led to a relationship with Ocean that lasted for several years.



BATMAN
VARIOUS (1986)

■ It's hard to imagine today, but a *Batman* game had been quite a risk for Ocean when it was released in 1985. It's a highly entertaining isometric adventure by Jon that marked the start of a collaboration with a friend of a friend called Bernie Drummond.



HEAD OVER HEELS
VARIOUS (1987)

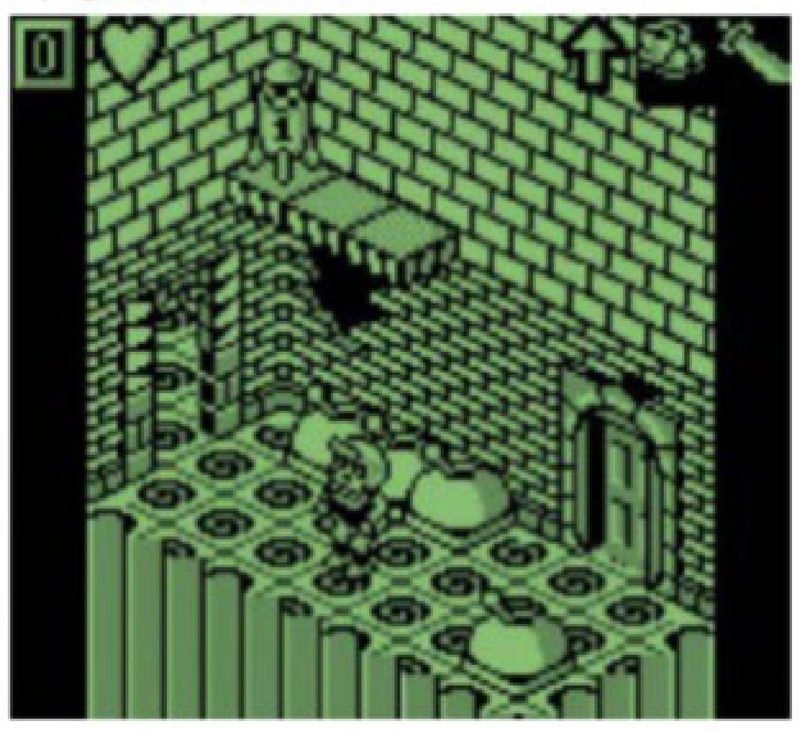
■ For many this remains Jon's greatest game. It's an absolutely gargantuan effort that builds massively on the isometric groundwork of *Batman* and introduces even more devious puzzles. It also created one of gaming's most lovable duos in the process.



MATCH DAY II
VARIOUS (1987)

■ Everything about Jon's football sequel was bigger and better than its 1984 predecessor. Bernie's sprite work is wonderful, while the addition of the Kickometer and Diamond Deflection System made the core gameplay even more enjoyable.

» [Game Boy] Flick the switches; get the missile. Here's hoping it doesn't detonate…



» [Game Boy] In other words: "Blow this guy up and you'll get some lovely money."



Over Heels. I found it very valuable to look over their shoulders as they played, and quite a few rooms were changed through how people were reacting and the problems they were having," he explains. "In some cases, it was down to how rooms were laid out. Because you don't have perspective, isometric can be confusing, and so I'd perhaps turn a room around and have it at a different angle. With the tiny Game Boy screen, I could no longer rope in friends, and so all the testing and changes were down to me, trying to put myself in the mindset of someone else. I hope I got it right, and it felt pretty good when I played it ten years later. Although I guess that procedure of waiting ten years to forget a game so that you can test it isn't very useful for a current release!"

Unfortunately, a weirdly lengthy delay (if not quite a decade) also happened with *Monster Max*'s actual release. It reviewed well, with 94 per cent in *GB Action* and a whopping 96 per cent in *Super Gamer*, which declared it the "best Game Boy title ever", but the game was held back for almost a year, heavily impacting on sales. "I've got no idea at all what happened," says Jon, sadly. "I'd been working with one of the Titus bosses – a very bright man – on all of the language stuff, because he spoke about six and could program. Everything seemed to be going ahead fine, with no trouble. And then after the game was complete, I had no more contact with him, and nothing happened for ages. It was strange after such great reviews."

Intriguingly, Jon reveals *Monster Max* could have found its way to market in a very different form: "I had the opportunity – and I would have taken it, had I known Titus was going to hang on to the game for a year – to change the graphics, drop the *Monster Max* character, use one of the *Mario* stable, and have Nintendo publish it." Jon says he doesn't know for sure what changes to the other graphics Nintendo would have demanded, but he imagines it would probably have been a lot, and that was what put him off at the time: "You get to that stage where you think 'we've finished it now', and any major changes would just feel like starting again. I know Shigeru Miyamoto played the game, and that there are aspects of things that he didn't like. I suspect whatever changes he would have wanted would have required rejigging all of the puzzles."

It wasn't to be, but Jon says he's still proud of the game itself and the following it retains today, if understandably disappointed its commercial success didn't match the critical acclaim. And Bernie, too, is delighted people are still talking about *Monster Max*: "It's good to hear classic games still have appeal. It's a lot of work making a game, and it sometimes seems disproportionate to the time someone might spend playing. But as an artist, you are in the business of creating a perfect moment. Layers of detail are designed to happen simultaneously, and knowing that people have enjoyed the results of our work makes it all worthwhile." *



Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



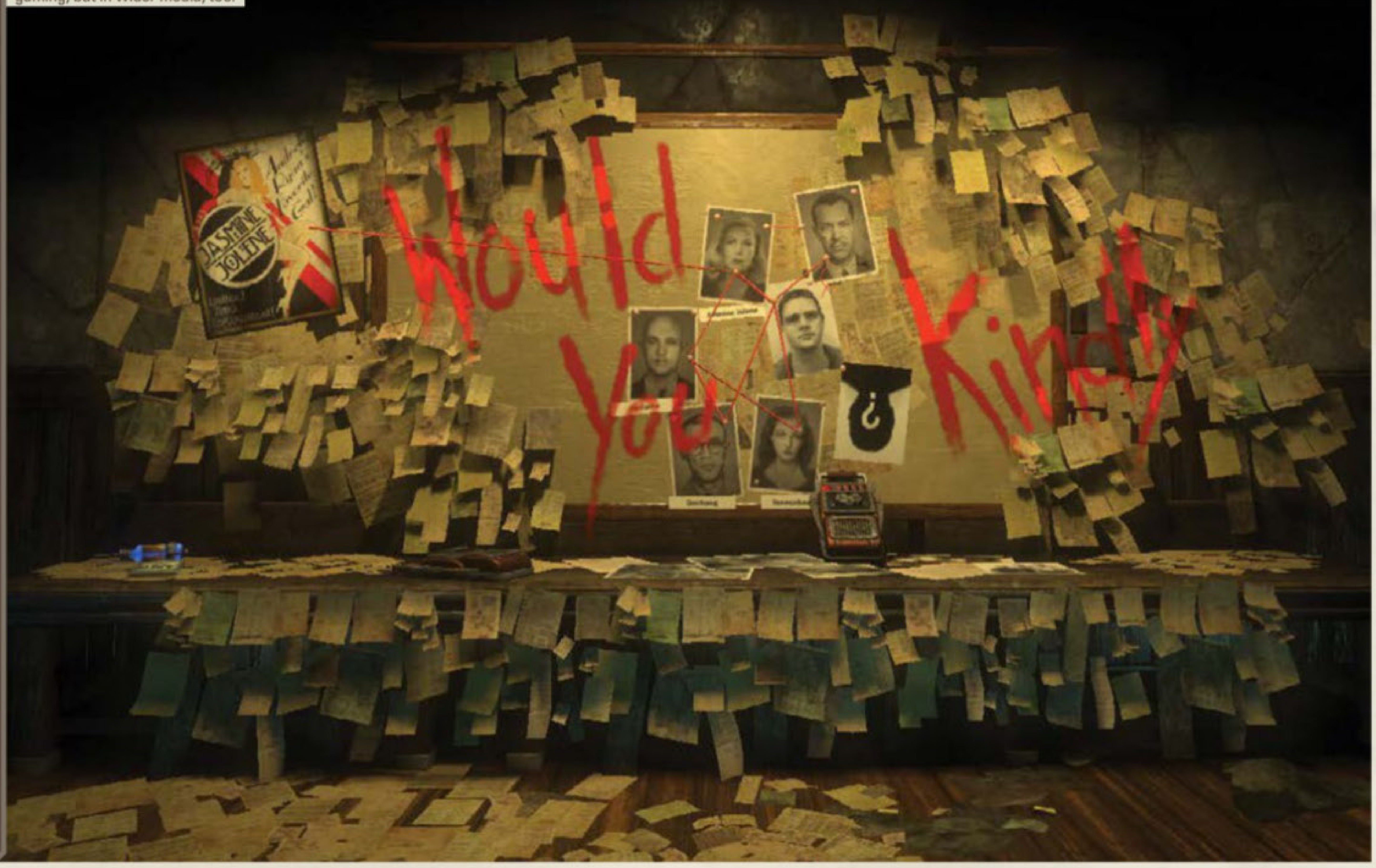
INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox 360 (also PS3, PC)
- **Year:** 2007
- **Publisher:** 2K Games
- **Developer:** 2K Boston/ 2K Australia
- **Key People:** Ken Levine, Alyssa Finley, Paul Hellquist, Scott Sinclair

GO DEEPER

- ***BioShock* antagonist Andrew Ryan is a nod to the game's biggest inspiration, objectivist author Ayn Rand.**
- **Originally, *BioShock* was conceived as a political sci-fi effort where the player reprogrammed his victims' minds.**

» [Xbox 360] The twist in *BioShock* remains not only one of the best narrative U-turns in gaming, but in wider media, too.



92. BIOSHOCK

Ken Levine's spiritual successor to the System Shock franchise, BioShock was a cerebral approach to the FPS genre that was as groundbreakingly meta as it was gruesome

THE BACKGROUND

After creating Irrational Games in 1997 and releasing *System Shock 2* in 1999, Ken Levine was at a loss. Together with Irrational, he'd already attempted to pitch another entry in the *System Shock* series, but had been roadblocked by EA, who cited the poor financial performance of his last game as reason enough to kill the franchise. Irrational and Levine kept themselves ticking over – releasing one game, *Freedom Force* – and working on multiple other projects that were never released, for one reason or another. All along, Levine wanted to go back to what he knew best – a story-based FPS that challenged the status quo of what was becoming a stagnating genre.

In 2002, a tech demo surfaced from Irrational – based on Unreal Engine 2, the game was set in a space station, and had a much more political, sci-fi gothic ambience than the final project. Levine and his team decided this sci-fi direction wasn't true to their vision, and scrapped the project… almost. Word had gotten out that, at long last, the spiritual heir to the *System Shock* legacy was in the works. Pressure fell upon the shoulders of Irrational, and when *BioShock* was formally announced in 2004, the similarities between *System Shock* and the game that would eventually launch in 2007 were palpable.

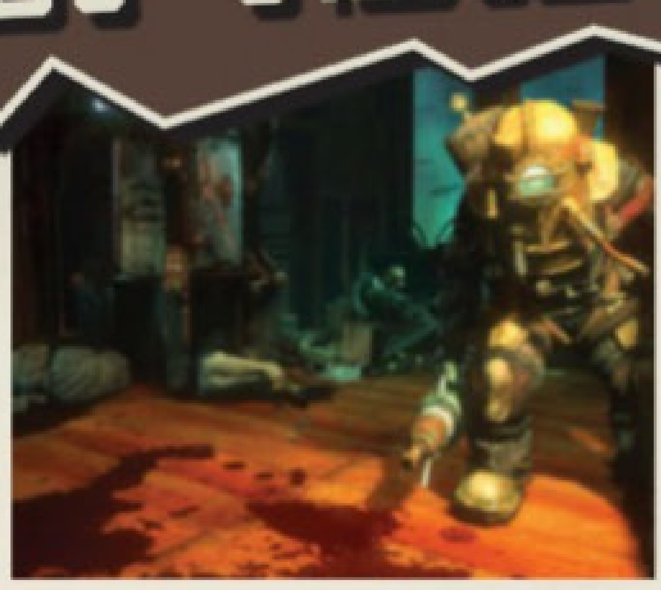
THE GAME

BioShock isn't just another first-person shooter – yes, there are weapons that can be selected, and yes, everything is perceived through the eyes of your unnamed protagonist. But that's where the similarities end. Even the way *BioShock* guides you through its levels was innovative back in 2007. For the majority of the game, the crumbling dystopia of Rapture is a sandbox, operating in zones that you can work through at your own pace; all of which is compounded by the not-quite-realistic art direction, a visual coating that has preserved the game from the erosion of age, a compliment not often given to 3D games.

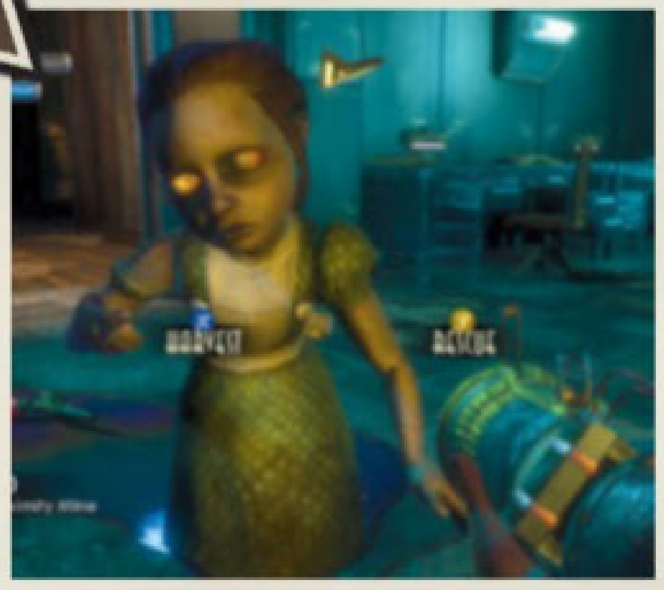
Things of note



The crash landing
Included in a demo that became the most downloaded ever on Xbox 360, the intro remains one of the most engrossing openings ever. It also showed off the superb water effects.



Your first Big Daddy
Stepping into one of the bigger arenas *BioShock* reserved for the Big Daddys is terrifying. You're badly equipped, low on ammo, and have no idea how powerful these things are. Run?



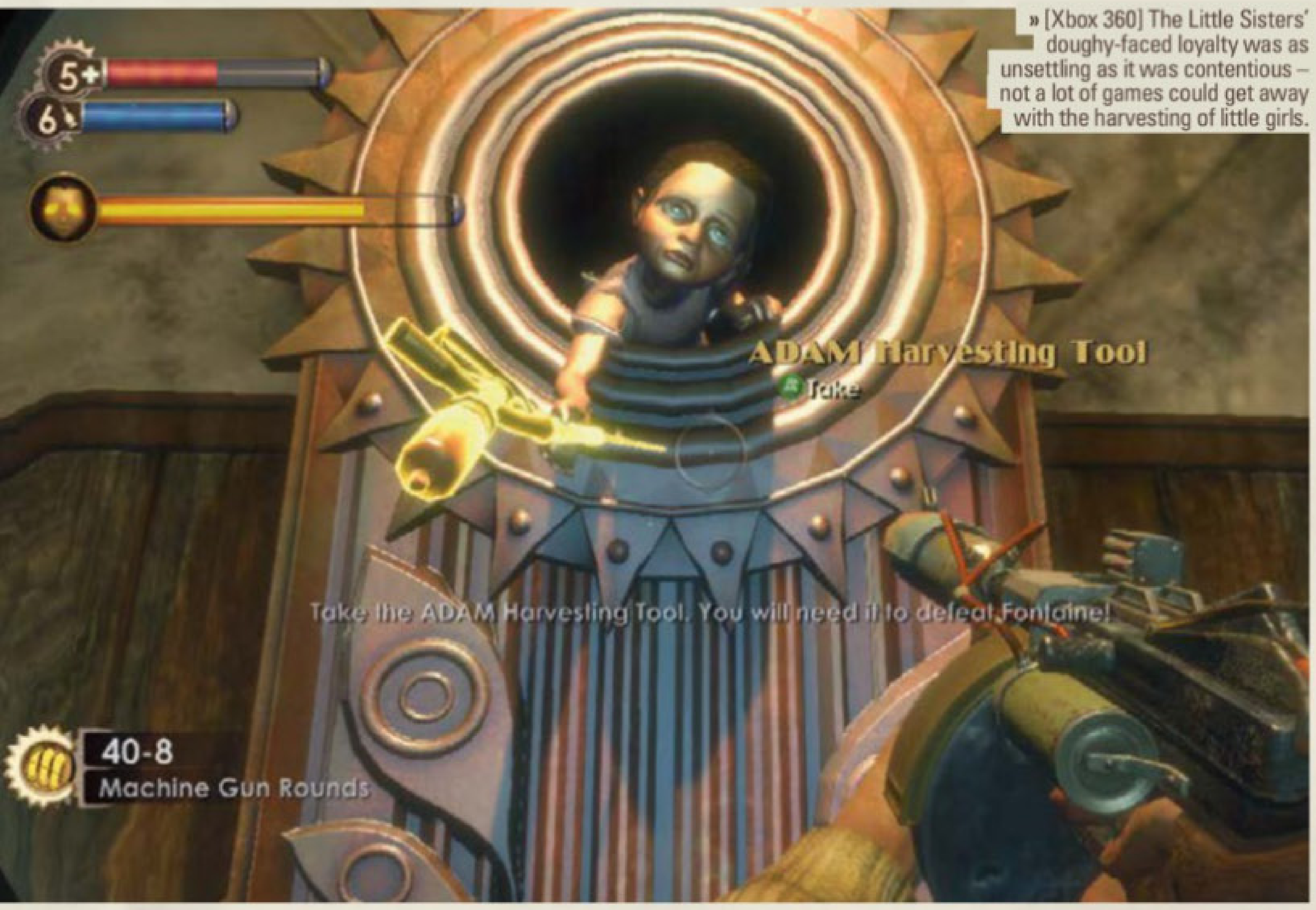
Little Sister shock
When you eventually take down your first Big Daddy, you're faced with a very polar moral choice – do you harvest or save the Little Sister that accompanies it?



Sander Cohen
One of the most twisted characters you're likely to come across in gaming. Sander is a hedonistic narcissist – a demented artist whose arena is unsettlingly gruesome.



The twist
We could say the words 'would you kindly?' defined a generation, but we're beyond that, so we're just going to say Levine's eye for iconic gravity is nearly flawless.



» [Xbox 360] The Little Sisters' doughy-faced loyalty was as unsettling as it was contentious – not a lot of games could get away with the harvesting of little girls.



» [Xbox 360] By mixing Plasmids with weapons, *BioShock* gave the choice of how to tackle levels to players directly.



» [Xbox 360] The environs you find are brought to life with lighting and water textures that broke new ground.

What the press thought



games™
Score: 10/10
"A full and consistent picture of a decayed society, where every character and every location seems completely organic and necessary to the world around it."

Eurogamer
Score: 10/10
"If you don't find something to love about *BioShock*, we'd recommend a trip to the nearest doctor to check if your heart's still beating."

Buckled water pipes, cracked glass and the ravaged gardens of a failed paradise hide more secrets than just little rooms with collectibles in – which was the trend in FPS games at the time. Levine's storytelling prowess leaks into every facet of the gameplay – the strategy-friendly Plasmids that complement the brute firepower of the guns each have their own little origin, their own place in the evocative world of Rapture. The hidden rooms, the side-quests, the audio tapes that litter Rapture's sub-aquatic ruins – each served a gameplay function *and* a narrative one. Each enemy type – from the myriad Splicer classes to the hulking Big Daddies to the foreign-yet-familiar Little Sisters – felt like they belonged, like they weren't just another randomly placed enemy animated with the same old AI.

While there were bosses punctuating the main story (each of which was thoughtfully alluded to in the build-up, given form by the paranoid rants of Rapture's crazed survivors), the main challenge in *BioShock* came from the Big Daddies; steampunk goliaths that tapped into the survival-horror inspirations Levine had decorated the game with. Once you wander into a room and hear the rotting wooden floorboards creaking beneath the weight of a Big Daddy's diving-suit boots, a very human sense of fight-or-flight kicks in; you know you could probably kill it, and then choose to harvest or save the Little Sister it has in tow, but that would deplete your reserve of Eve – Plasmid fuel – and eat through your scant ammo. Because even though your collection of Plasmids would allow you to set up traps and lead this Big Daddy on a chase that would chip away at his health, ultimately you *will* be backed into a corner with this thing, and it *will* devolve into a firefight.



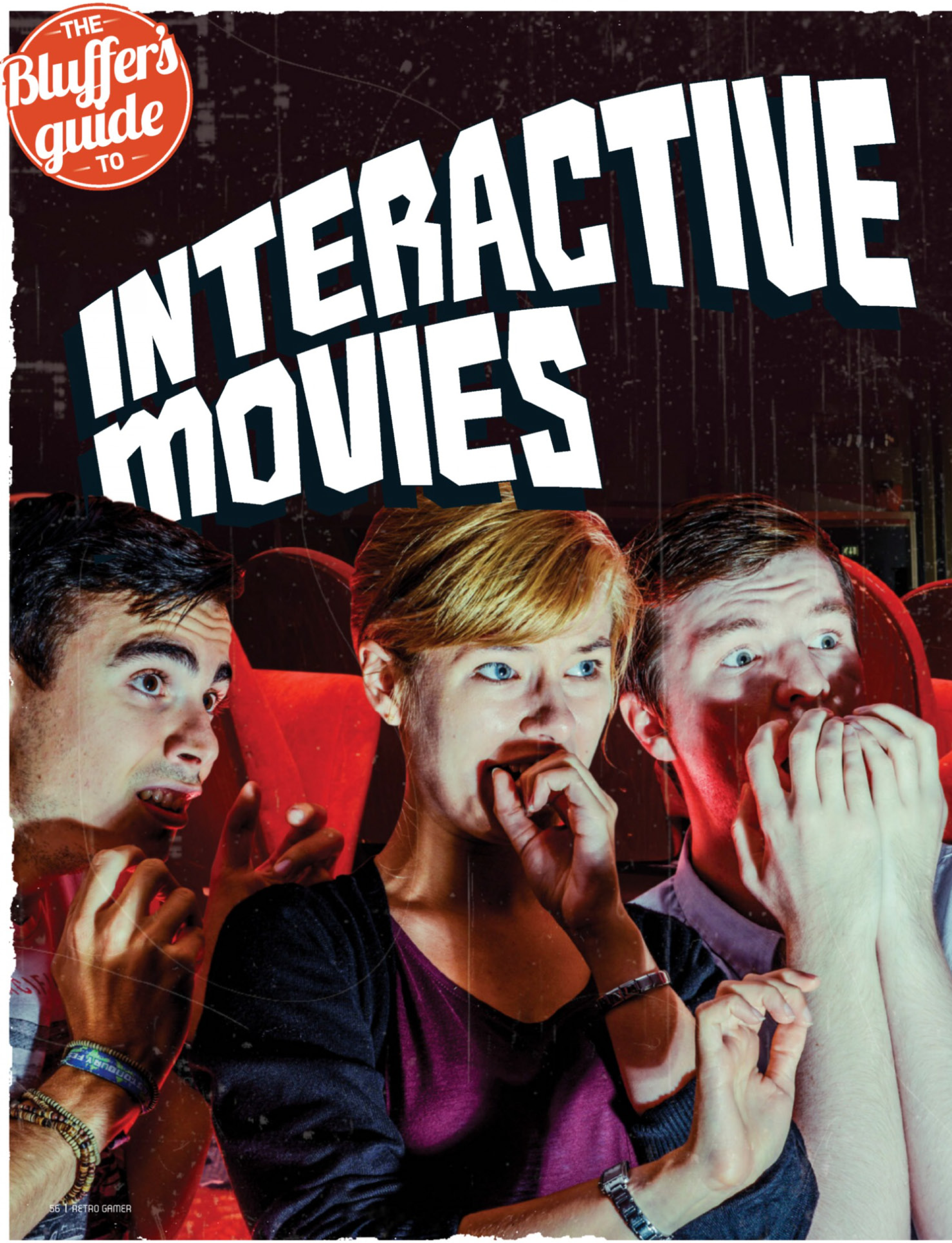
This brutal, run-and-gun gameplay contrasts noticeably with the literature influences that inform its story. At its root, the game is about altruism versus objectivism – taking cues from Ayn Rand's divisive *Atlas Shrugged* – and does a fascinating job of stacking the two philosophical arguments up against each other. Even before the infamous twist is revealed, *BioShock* generates a sense of something being horribly *off*; a permeating feeling of dread that something's not quite right. As a player, it spurs you on; you want to harvest as much Adam (Plasmid power, effectively) as possible, upgrade your guns to the max, save or destroy as many Little Sisters as you can because you know – God, do you *know* – that something wicked and terrifying awaits you at the centre of one of the most complete gaming cities ever to reach our screens.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

BioShock isn't just the work of a collection of incredibly talented developers – it's Ken Levine's magnum opus, the most well realised of all his projects to date. It took everything that made *System Shock* great, and brought that to console gamers, mapping mechanics and controls to the gamepad in a manner that was both familiar and ostensibly *new*. *BioShock* is self-aware; it took the first-person shooter and deconstructed it, observing all the tropes that were driving the genre to stagnation. 'A slave obeys', it tells us, as we smash our own father's head in with a golf club – an activity we had no choice but to perform. It took the assumptions developers (and players) had made about the FPS protagonist, turned them on their head, and fired them back at us. We can't think of any games that have done it so well, so masterfully, before or since. *

THE Bluffer's guide TO

INTERACTIVE MOVIES



Never the main feature but undeniably important, the FMV-driven interactive movie genre has given us multi-million dollar hits and some of gaming's most controversial releases. Pick up a pad and get ready to take control as Nick Thorpe guides you through gaming's grindhouse

When considering the entertainment media that shaped the development of videogames, movies must surely rank amongst the most influential, with the likes of Hideo Kojima and David Cage openly acknowledging cinematic influences on their hit games. But while it's easy to find videogames which include cinematic elements today, we haven't reached this point without a lot of work – today's products bear little resemblance to their historical precursors.

Film directors have been exploring interactivity since the Sixties. The first interactive movie to reach audiences was *Kinoautomat*, by director Radúz Činčera. Shown for the first time at Expo '67 in Montreal, it allowed the audience to vote on the protagonist's actions at key points in the movie. It was a groundbreaking work, but the interactivity was limited – no matter what choice was made, the plot always converged to a single thread before a vote as there were only two projectors running, and the protagonist's home always goes up in flames at the end. It's a bleak ending, but that's perhaps to be expected – hailing from communist-ruled Czechoslovakia, the director had intended the film as a satire of democracy. It was a promising start, but videogame technology wouldn't be added to the mix until some 15 years later.

The very earliest attempts to integrate video footage into videogames began in 1981. The US-based magazine *Creative Computing* had commissioned author David Lubar to write an adventure game that used laserdiscs, a task which required an Apple II computer, a Pioneer VP-1000 laserdisc player and an interface to link the two from a small company called Aurora Systems. The project resulted in a text adventure which played scenes from the 1977 film *Rollercoaster*, in which the player was tasked with stopping a bomber from killing riders on a rollercoaster. The BASIC listing was published in the January 1982 issue of the magazine, making for a fascinating but expensive project.

The requirement for expensive ▶



» [PlayStation] Even on the PlayStation, interactive movies like Psychic Detective often ran in a window.

KNOW YOUR INTERACTIVE MOVIES

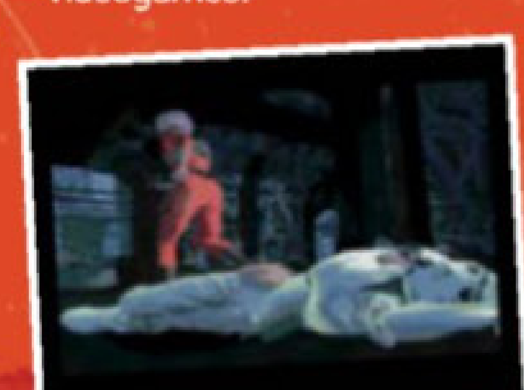
CODEC
■ Hardware or software designed to encode and decode data streams – for example, video footage or audio recordings.



LASERDISC
■ A large optical disc that carried high-quality analogue video, used in some interactive movies. A precursor to DVD.



FMV
■ An abbreviation of full-motion video, consisting of pre-recorded video clips which appear as part of videogames.



QTE
■ An abbreviation of quick-time event, an in-game instance that requires a quick, specific reaction to an on-screen prompt.



INTERACTIVE MOVIE
■ A game that makes heavy use of full-motion video as part of gameplay, with or without additional computer-generated graphics. There are no limitations on what form the gameplay takes – as such, games categorised as interactive movies come from genres as diverse as puzzle, shooting and racing games.



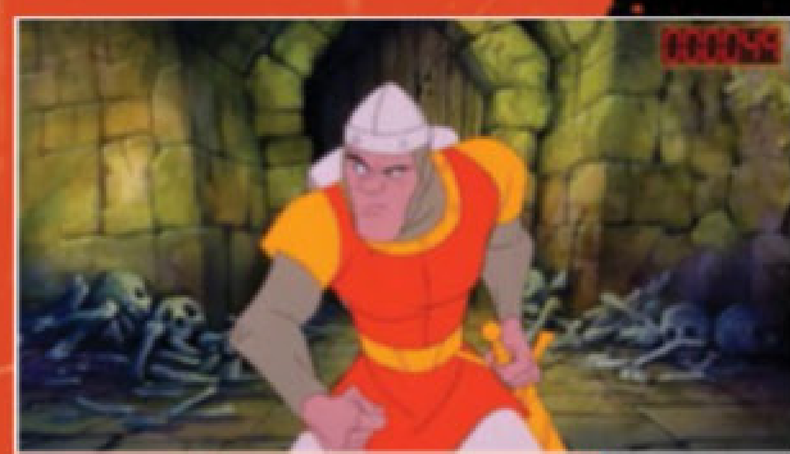
5 ESSENTIAL GAMES

The footage that any aspiring directors should roll before yelling "action" for the first time

DRAGON'S LAIR

■ 1983 ■ ARCADE

It isn't the deepest game in the world and it's not the first of its kind, but *Dragon's Lair* is a landmark release all the same, as it popularised its genre and is the nostalgic favourite of many. Over 30 years on, Don Bluth's animation retains its ability to impress.



NIGHT TRAP

■ 1992 ■ MEGA-CD

Sure, it's noteworthy for being controversial, but *Night Trap* is worth playing regardless. The trap-'em-up gameplay provides a tough challenge for both your memory and your reactions, and the design which allows players to switch rooms at will is easily one of the most ambitious amongst the early FMV games.



SILPHEED

■ 1993 ■ MEGA-CD

By overlaying simple polygonal visuals over a pre-rendered FMV backdrop, Game Arts managed to give players the illusion that the Mega-CD was much more capable than it actually was. While *Astron Belt* was the first game to utilise the template, *Silpheed* is the easily among the best.



PHANTASMAGORIA

■ 1995 ■ PC

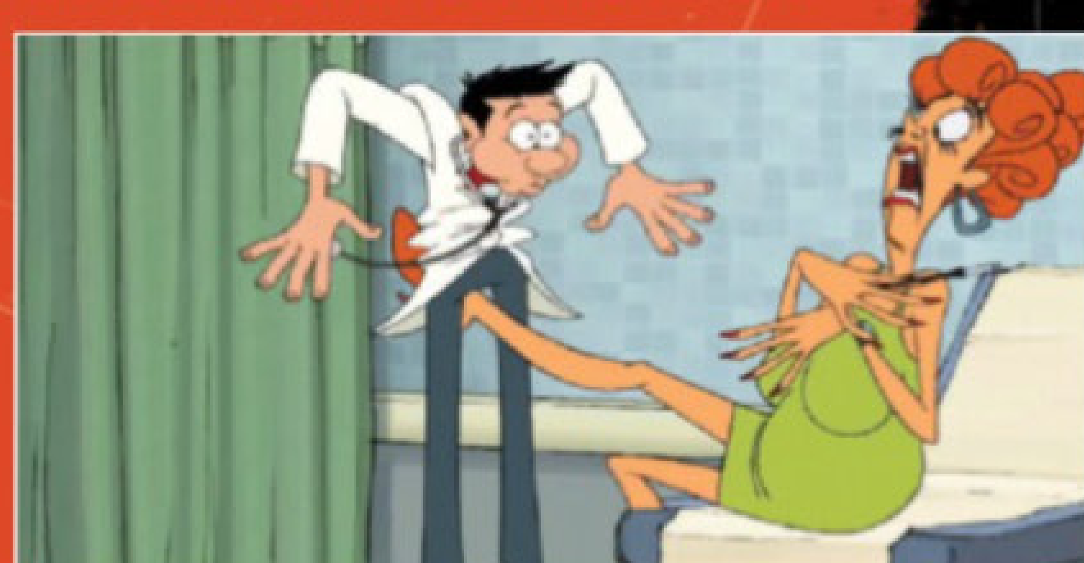
Phantasmagoria is a sub-par game that relies heavily on controversial content to paper over the cracks, including some incredibly grim death scenes we couldn't possibly print in the magazine. It's a horrible experience, but one that is key to understanding the poor reputation that FMV games generally have these days.



THE ACT

■ 2012 ■ iOS

Originally designed for arcade release in 2007, *The Act* wound up being cancelled for that market but was resurrected for iOS devices in 2012. A great example of the modern interactive movie featuring lovely cartoon footage from ex-Disney animators, gameplay involves managing protagonist Edgar's reactions to the various scenarios he faces.



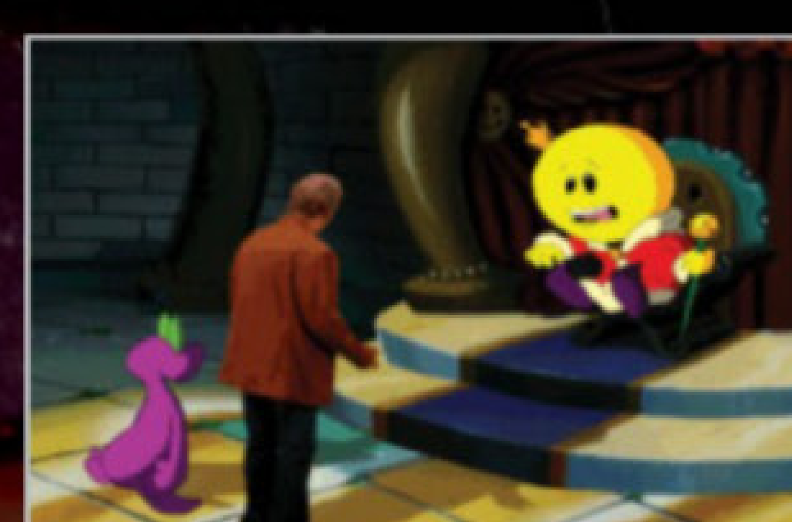


» [Arcade] Clearly computer-generated, *Astron Belt*'s sprites clashed with the more detailed laserdisc background.

dedicated hardware might have put computer users off, but it wasn't such an issue for arcade operators. The first laserdisc arcade game out of the gates was *Quarter Horse*, a horse betting simulator which utilised footage of real races. The game's laserdisc contained footage of 60 races, with two commentary tracks for each to provide the illusion of further races. Later in 1982 Sega provided trade demonstrations of *Astron Belt*, a sci-fi shooter which utilised footage from a Japanese film of the same name. This game overlaid sprites on top of the laserdisc footage, which provided both enemies and obstacles for the player. The formula didn't find huge success the first time around, but was later adapted by better-known games such as *Silpheed* and *Microcosm*.

It was a key 1983 release that took interactive movies to the gaming mainstream. Developed by RDI Video Systems, *Dragon's Lair* followed Dirk the Daring's quest to rescue Princess Daphne from the evil dragon Singe and was quite unlike anything that had been seen before. The gameplay was extremely simple, with players required to push the joystick and button according to on-screen prompts in order to avoid danger and move the knight to his next scene. However, the game's high quality animation, commissioned from ex-Disney animator Don Bluth, impressed players sufficiently that the game was a roaring success in spite of its simplicity and high credit price of two US quarters. The interactive movie genre had its first major hit, and looked to be living up to its name – contemporary news reports state that Don Bluth believed that more elaborate interactive feature films would be possible, enabling personalised experiences for each viewer.

Dragon's Lair eventually grossed over $30 million for manufacturer Cinematronics, and prompted the development of further games – *Dragon's Lair II* and *Space Ace* were swiftly put into production, although the former would be delayed until 1991, and Don Bluth was looking to produce five videogame titles per year. Other companies also got in on the act – Atari, Data East, Gottlieb, Stern Electronics and Taito had all released laserdisc games by 1985. RDI Video Systems even designed the Halcyon console, a laserdisc-based home console with voice recognition features, but the company went bankrupt shortly



» [PC] *Toonstruck* mixes live actors with animated characters, and FMV scenes with sprite-based sections.

SELECTED TIMELINE

SHOWING IN 1982
QUARTER HORSE
■ This sports betting game was the first coin-op game to integrate a laserdisc player, showing footage of real races.

SHOWING IN 1983
ASTRON BELT
■ Sega's laserdisc debut provides deeper gameplay by overlaying sprites on an FMV backdrop, licensed from a Japanese sci-fi film.

SHOWING IN 1984
FIREFOX
■ Atari launches its first and only laserdisc title, an on-rails shooting game based on a Clint Eastwood action film.

SHOWING IN 1985
ROAD BLASTER
■ Data East's much-ported game became one of the last released in the original wave of laserdisc games.

SHOWING IN 1990
MAD DOG MCCREE
■ American Laser Games revives the arcade laserdisc scene, releasing a lightgun shooter with a classic Western theme.

SHOWING IN 1991
SHERLOCK HOLMES: CONSULTING DETECTIVE
■ CD-ROM technology provided a series of FMV mysteries for the venerable sleuth to solve.

SHOWING IN 1992
SEWER SHARK
■ This vermin-blasting NEMO refugee finally sees the light of day on Mega-CD, courtesy of Digital Pictures and Sony Imagesoft.

SHOWING IN 1993
MICROCOSM
■ Psygnosis' shoot-'em-up garners high marks from Amiga magazines, which laud it as the first true demonstration of the CD32's abilities.

SHOWING IN 1994
GALAXIAN 3: ATTACK OF THE ZOLGEAR
■ Namco offers a six-player arcade rail shooter with branching paths, housed in a monstrous multi-laserdisc, multi-projector attraction cabinet.

SHOWING IN 1995
FAHRENHEIT
■ A game from Sega's short-lived internal interactive movie studio, this firefighting drama provided an enhanced 32X version in the box.

SHOWING IN 1996
PHANTASMAGORIA: A PUZZLE OF FLESH
■ Sierra Entertainment's sequel attracts controversy and censorship in many nations, due to its sexual content and scenes of graphic violence.

SHOWING IN 1998
THE X-FILES GAME
■ The last major interactive movie to hit a mainstream console, this TV tie-in featured many of the hit show's cast members. It was released on PC and PlayStation and used the VirtualCinema engine.

SHOWING IN 2005
DOCTOR WHO: ATTACK OF THE GRASKE
■ Players are tasked with identifying aliens and aiding The Doctor in an interactive TV game based on the long-running series.

SHOWING IN 2006
THE ACT
■ Cecropia location tests the arcade version of its interactive movie, which fails to make it to market but later resurfaces on iOS.

SHOWING IN 2012
BEAR STEARNS BRAVO
■ The guys behind cult Twitter account Horse_ebooks release an online interactive movie based on the financial crisis of 2007-2008.

SHOWING IN 2014
TESLA EFFECT: A TEX MURPHY ADVENTURE
■ After raising almost $600,000 on Kickstarter, Chris Jones and Aaron Conners bring Tex Murphy out of retirement.

> "I was personally not interested in creating just another videogame"
> Tom Zito

after its completion with only two games finished.

However laserdisc games soon fell from grace, just as quickly as they had risen. Part of the problem was that the pre-defined gameplay of games like *Dragon's Lair* could effectively be learned, damaging staying power with players. The other problem was staying power on the arcade floor – laserdisc units were generally designed for continuous play rather than the random access required of games, and were subject to far heavier use than in the home, breaking down as a result. Combined with the market slump of the mid-Eighties, these factors caused operators to turn their backs on the expensive cabinets. Laserdisc games would resurface in the Nineties thanks to American Laser Games releases such as *Mad Dog McCree*, but again only enjoyed a few years of popularity. That wasn't the end for interactive movies, though.

Late in 1984, Nolan Bushnell was setting up a high-tech toy company called Axlon and had offered a job to Tom Zito, a journalist who had profiled him for *The New Yorker*. Flattered but initially unwilling to give up his journalistic career, Tom changed his mind about joining Axlon when the magazine's long-serving editor William Shawn suggested that he take up the job for journalistic purposes. "I told Nolan that I was going to be writing a story about it, that I could only do it for a year, and he was happy with that," recalls Tom, who moved to California in April 1985 to start the job. "And then, after three months, I was no longer taking notes



» [PC] Modern platforms have caught up with laserdisc video quality, allowing new releases of *Dragon's Lair* to boast authentic presentation.



» [PC] Another Don Bluth animation, *Space Ace* is one of the original wave of laserdisc releases.



» [3DO] *The Daedalus Encounter* provides a lot of on-screen options, but is just as interactive as other examples of the genre.

WE SPEAK TO Giovanni Lemm, Night Trap actor



What was your acting experience prior to *Night Trap*?
Night Trap was my first professional gig. I had just signed with an agency in Hollywood and it was my very first audition and I got it. Prior to that I had done some school theatre, but nothing major.

How did the interactivity impact shooting as compared to a non-interactive feature?
We had do the same things over and over again just like any other type of project. There were several changes in each take for obvious reasons. To be quite honest I was hoping that there would be more interactivity, but I think with the newness of the technology they just weren't sure how that was going to work.

How long did shooting take?
It was only a four-week shoot in July of 1987.

The game took a number of years to make it to market – how much did you know about the game's progress during that time?
Once the shoot was over I actually never heard about it again. I didn't even think about it again until the early 2000s. I found the game on eBay and bid on it and won. I've actually never even played the game. However I do have the copies of it. I found it on YouTube as well, it's pretty cool to watch.

Did you ever foresee the controversy that the game would eventually cause? How did you feel about it?
In regards to controversy, you're going to have that no matter what it is. People just like to get their panties in a wad no matter what the topic. In comparison to even cartoons we watched as children it was very, very tame.

Did you continue acting after *Night Trap*? What are you doing now?
I did a number of B films, lots of promotional videos and some modelling. I ended up becoming a musician and was in a band in Los Angeles. I traveled around Europe two times as a street musician. Eventually, I got into the fight game. I moved to Virginia over a decade ago and fought for a number of years. I then started my own martial arts school and now I own the largest mixed martial arts promotion in Virginia.

I am glad to have been part of *Night Trap* and though it's small comparable to life in general, it's cool to be part of history. Plus, now I'm a tattoo on someone's arm. That's when you know you've made it.

▶ for my story." Later that year, Tom was shopping in a New York camera store during a trip to see his family when he noticed an unusual occurrence. "I couldn't figure out what in the world kids were doing in a camera shop," he recalls. "And lo and behold, they were waiting for their turn to play a NES." Tom promptly bought one to take back to California. "I thought if anybody could get back into the videogame business and do something to challenge Nintendo, it was Nolan."

They set to work on planning a new console which used video tapes, but hit upon a fundamental difference. Nolan's idea was to use the tapes to store code, much as cassettes were used in computing, in order to reduce costs and undercut Nintendo. "There was a lot of wisdom in his idea, but I was personally not interested in just creating another videogame," explains Tom, whose idea was more ambitious – he wished to leverage the video cassettes to use filmed footage of real actors. It was also Tom's idea which progressed further. Having secured funding via connections with Hasbro, the project – codenamed NEMO – began to take shape. The system was able to interleave video streams, enabling the user to switch between multiple video streams on one tape. Two games were shot and ready to go, *Sewer Shark* and *Night Trap*, but the system never made it to the shelves. "Hasbro had been very adamant that the hardware had to be on the shelf for $200," Tom explains. A RAM price spike made that target impossible, and with the retail price set to double, Hasbro pulled the plug. Less sophisticated VHS-based systems such as the Action Max eventually made it to market through other companies, but flopped.

However, Tom had retained the rights to the games, and the technology to finally deliver them wasn't far away. The emergence of CD-ROM technology in the late Eighties had caught the attention of game developers, and thanks to Nintendo's desire to augment the SNES with a CD-ROM drive, Sony was looking for software. During a visit to a former NEMO developer, Sony happened upon *Sewer Shark* and was interested in buying the game. "They wanted it as a launch title for the PlayStation," Tom explains, referring not to the 1994 console but the unreleased all-in-one SNES CD unit. The games were found to be impossible on the system even prior to the acrimonious end of Sony and Nintendo's CD-ROM partnership, and Sony found their way to Sega's Mega-CD add-on. The games were possible on this system, but with a video quality Tom describes as "horrible", thanks to the limited colour palette of the aging Mega Drive hardware.

Contrary to the modern perception of FMV-based games, the ex-NEMO titles met a warm reception on both critical and commercial fronts. Tunnel-based shoot-'em-up *Sewer Shark* became the pack-in game for the Mega-CD in North America, helping it to sell over a million units. *Night Trap* received good reviews from a number of magazines, with *Mean Machines Sega* going so far as to declare it "the most advanced and innovative Mega-CD game." Other products were rather less well received by critics, including the *Make My Video* series of music video editing games, but the biggest negative reception of all would come from outside of gaming.

In December 1993, hearings on violent videogames were held in the US Congress, chaired by Joseph Lieberman and Herbert Kohl. ▶



» [Arcade] *Road Blaster* is one of the early laserdisc titles, launched by Data East in the arcade.



» [Mega-CD] *Road Avenger* shows how Mega-CD laserdisc conversions looked quite poor.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT INTERACTIVE MOVIE?

The key qualities the academy will look for during awards season



INTERACTIVITY
■ The more of this, the better – if you can't manipulate what you see on-screen, it's just a movie.

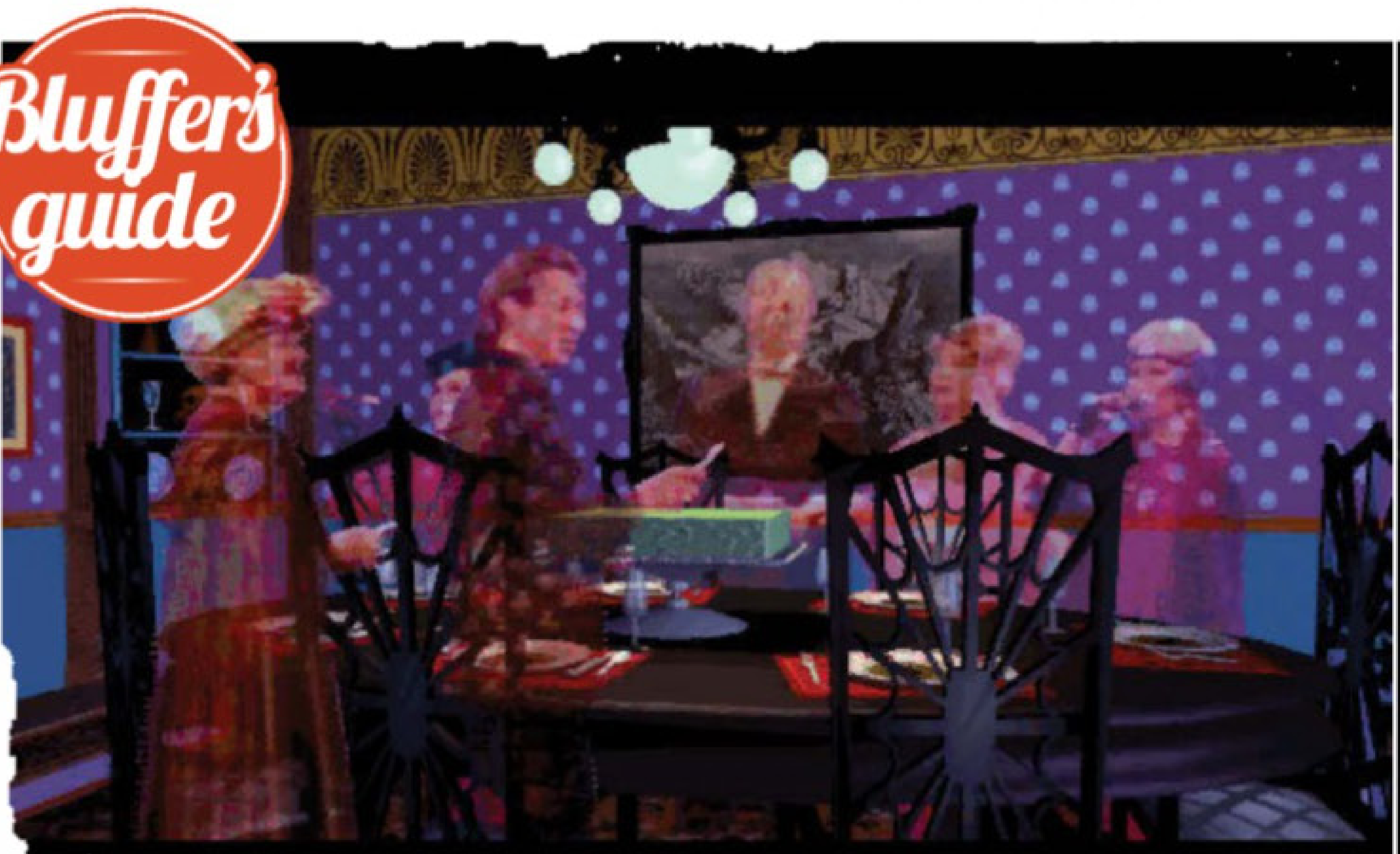
ACTORS
■ No matter whether they're Hollywood names or B-movie regulars, the actors are a fundamental part of the interactive movie experience.

TECHNOLOGY
■ Interactive movies live and die by their video quality – compression, frame rate and colour all play their part here.

GENRE
■ While interactive movies can encompass many genres, some such as racing games struggle, making more dramatic, slower-paced games preferable.

PLOT
■ Interactivity can only go so far – interactive movies are typically heavy on the plot, because it has to be a movie worth watching.

> "If anybody could get back into games and challenge Nintendo, it was Nolan"
>
> Tom Zito



» [PC] *The 7th Guest* uses FMV to display the ghostly previous visitors of the game's deadly mansion.



» [Mega-CD] *Prize Fighter* uses a window smaller than the video itself, shifting it around to simulate the fighter's head.



» [Mega-CD 32X] Use of the 32X boosted the Mega-CD's FMV capabilities, producing less grainy games.

▶ These hearings focused on a range of games including *Mortal Kombat* and *Lethal Enforcers*, but easily the most notorious was *Night Trap*. It was also the most misunderstood – the aim of the game, according to the interpretation of the politicians, was to trap and kill the girls. Tom was subpoenaed to appear, but never got to speak in defence of the game. Toys R Us pulled the game from the shelves in the US, but the controversy spurred extra sales. "I used to joke that Joe Lieberman was our vice president of marketing," Tom tells us.

Regardless of what was going on in politics, interactive movies were clearly making an impact. Developers in other genres began to incorporate the features of interactive movies into their games. Graphic adventure *The 7th Guest* was hailed by no less than Bill Gates as "a new standard of interactive entertainment", incorporating FMV during gameplay to display ghostly visions of your fellow guests and inspiring the hugely popular *Myst* series. Space battle simulator *Wing Commander III* expanded on the storytelling of its predecessors by including interactive FMV scenes which had a bearing on the storyline, with the morale of pilots in battle scenes also affected by choices made. At the same time, interactive movie developers sought to make games that were more like traditional videogames, branching into genres such as fighting and sports. "If I had to pick the FMV game that I actually thought delivered the goods in terms of gameplay, it would be *Supreme Warrior*," Tom tells us.

As they had in the Eighties, a number of manufacturers began to look into the possibility of consoles which specialised in displaying FMV. Pioneer's LaserActive was a laserdisc player, which with optional expansion modules could play games for the Mega Drive or PC Engine and their respective CD add-ons, as well as new laserdisc-based games for both formats. Other formats were less heavily dedicated to FMV, though still offered major support. The 3DO hosted a variety of FMV games and even found itself drafted in as a replacement for laserdisc units in American Laser Games' arcade releases. The PC-FX had FMV capabilities that surpassed those of the Saturn and PlayStation, and became home to a number of interactive movies as a result. Users that had picked up both Sega's Mega-CD and 32X could use the complete setup to play enhanced versions of existing FMV-based Mega-CD games.

But as the Nineties wore on, it became clear that the writing was on the wall for interactive movies. Once the initial excitement of video had worn off, the limitations of FMV as a basis for gameplay were exposed as they were in the mid-Eighties, and critical opinion began to sour on interactive movies. Tom believes that technological requirements had forced interactive movie developers into playing for the wrong audience: "I think, because all of us were trying to do this stuff on what was considered to be a hardcore gaming platform, that the genre as a whole got its legs cut off because the combatants had run onto the wrong battlefield."

Another factor leading to the decline of interactive movies was the rise of polygonal 3D graphics. While still nowhere near reaching the level of realism offered by real footage, the 3D capabilities of the PlayStation and Saturn offered developers much more freedom in designing games – and more importantly lower costs, as FMV was very costly to produce. Hiring actors, building sets and purchasing equipment was an expensive endeavour, often stretching into millions of dollars. Companies looked to save money by making use of existing footage – Sega managed to produce a *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* game for the Mega-CD in less than three

> "I used to joke that Joe Lieberman was our vice president of marketing"
> Tom Zito

DREAM CAST

The actors that lent their star power to interactive movies



DANA PLATO
■ NIGHT TRAP
One of the most famous star turns in an FMV game, Plato starred in *Diff'rent Strokes* before getting into vampire evasion.



ROBERT COSTANZO
■ SEWER SHARK
Playing the corrupt Commissioner Stenchler, Costanzo is better known for playing Vito Lorenzo, the cop who tickets John McClane in *Die Hard 2*.



COREY HAIM
■ DOUBLE SWITCH
One of the stars of teen vampire classic *The Lost Boys*, Haim plays Eddie, who needs freeing from the basement.



DEBBIE HARRY
■ DOUBLE SWITCH
Well-known for a film career including *Videodrome* and *Hairspray*, not to mention being Blondie's vocalist, Harry plays Elizabeth – Eddie's mum.

DID YOU KNOW

1 One of the earliest interactive movies was published in *Creative Computing* magazine as a type-in listing which required a wealth of very expensive additional hardware, based on the 1977 film *Rollercoaster*.

2 *Dragon's Lair* wasn't the first laserdisc-based coin-op game – that honour goes to *Quarter Horse*, a horse racing simulation which allows players to bet on races streamed from laserdisc.

3 The Mega-CD games *Sewer Shark* and *Night Trap* originated as titles for Hasbro's NEMO, a VHS-based console which never saw the light of day due to cost problems.

4 Sony bought *Sewer Shark* with the intention to use it as a launch title for the PlayStation, the hybrid SNES CD console which preceded its 1994 console of the same name.

5 Due to the notoriety it gained from the hearings on videogame violence in the US Congress, *Night Trap* was pulled from shelves by Toys R Us.

6 *The 7th Guest* received praise from one of the most important men in the computing business, being hailed by Microsoft supremo Bill Gates as "a new standard of interactive entertainment."

7 Sega managed to put together an interactive movie based on *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* in less than three months by exclusively using existing footage from the TV show.



» [CD-i] *Burn Cycle* is one of the most notable games on its host system, alongside Philips' licensed titles.

months by cutting together footage from the shows.

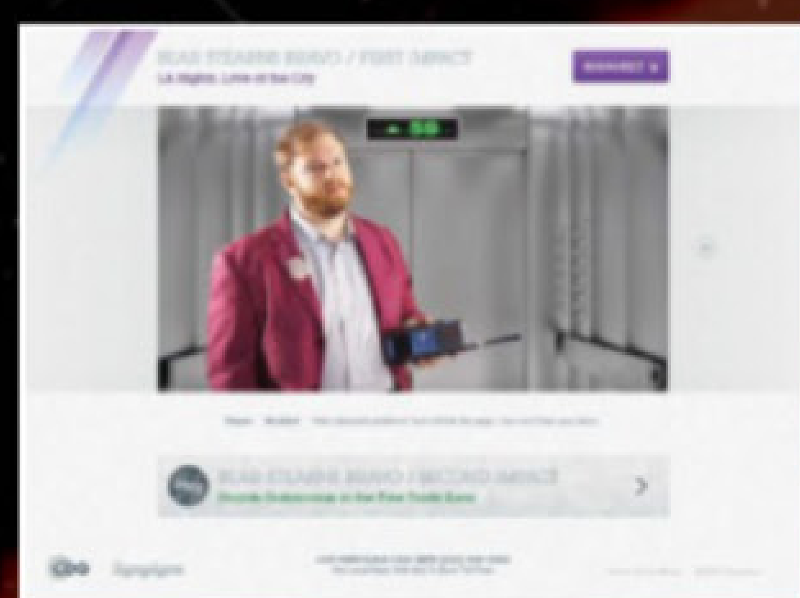
But even this was hard going, as Tom explains. "One of the things we tried to do and never managed to pull off was an interactive version of *Star Trek*. We got William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy involved and we really went to town on this." This is an intriguing prospect, but one which failed to deliver thanks to the limitations of linear editing systems. "The two people who were trying to stitch it all together basically went crazy, it was a monumental task."

Due to these factors, interactive movies started to fade from the core gaming market after 1995. The last high-profile release of the CD-ROM era was *The X-Files Game*, Fox Interactive's 1998 tie-in to the hit TV show. However, the genre would live on through attempts to capture the wider, more casual market that Tom had always intended to court. The interactivity of DVD offered opportunities for re-releases of genre classics such as *Dragon's Lair*, while *Doctor Who: Attack Of The Graske* achieved almost half a million players when it aired on the BBC's Red Button interactive TV service over the Christmas of 2005. The availability of online video delivery services has allowed for new titles like the web game *Bear Stearns Bravo*, and mobile platforms now play host to the likes of *The 7th Guest*. Meanwhile, the success of the Kickstarter for *Tesla Effect: A Tex Murphy Adventure* shows that some core players still have an appetite for FMV.

While the interactive movie is now largely a bygone concept for most core gamers, it has had an impact on the way that games are produced today. The style of gameplay employed in *Dragon's Lair* was revived and rechristened by Yu Suzuki for *Shenmue*, and the newly-named QTE scenes have since been included in major releases such as *Resident Evil 4* and *God Of War*. Additionally, while footage of celebrity actors is no longer regularly used, Hollywood stars now regularly appear in videogames as voice actors. *Beyond: Two Souls* went even further, with stars Ellen Page and Willem Dafoe providing voice acting and motion capture to 3D models bearing their likenesses, allowing the game's designers to leverage star power and acting ability without restricting their own options. So while you're unlikely to see many interactive movies in the future, you can certainly see the DNA of the genre in today's big-budget releases – surely a legacy to be proud of. ★



» [PC] Games like *The 7th Guest* and *Dragon's Lair* have received a new lease of life, particularly on iOS devices.



» [PC] *Bear Stearns Bravo* is a web-based FMV game, which utilises YouTube for video delivery.



TIA CARRERE

■ THE DAEDALUS ENCOUNTER

Best known for playing Cassandra Wong in the *Wayne's World* movies, Carrere plays one of your two crewmates here.



CHRISTOPHER LLOYD

■ TOONSTRUCK

It's Doc Brown from *Back To The Future*! Here he plays disillusioned animator Drew Blanc, sucked into his own cartoon world.



MARK HAMILL

■ WING COMMANDER III: HEART OF THE TIGER

You'll undoubtedly know him as *Star Wars*' hero Luke Skywalker, but he plays protagonist Christopher Blair in this space opera.



RICHARD NORTON

■ TESLA EFFECT: A TEX MURPHY ADVENTURE

As well as *Tex Murphy* and Jackie Chan flicks *City Hunter* and *Mr Nice Guy*, Norton is seen in 1994 release *Supreme Warrior*.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home



» Unorthodox fighters like the monkey-like Sarumaru, who walks around on his foot-mounted blades, are very cool. Unfortunately, too few of the game's characters exhibit his level of personality.

» *Dragoon Might*'s characters seem anachronistic in an urban setting. They appear much more at home in the tranquil natural backgrounds, some of which are reminiscent of *The Last Blade*.

» With a name like Zack, it's obvious that our fighter is a totally radical dude – so much so that his super attack involves him surfing on his comically oversized sword.

» Super attacks are very easy to pull off in *Dragoon Might*, but come with the disadvantage of a health drain. They're usually very beneficial when they hit, though.



DRAGOON MIGHT

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Fighting

■ **Konami isn't a big name in the fighting game business.** Despite having done so much to develop the genre with *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, the company's efforts to capitalise on the post-*Street Fighter II* popularity of the genre ended up falling flat. So it's with some surprise that we recall *Dragoon Might* being not only being pretty decent, but also reasonably innovative.

In *Dragoon Might*, you play as one of 12 characters seeking to unite the Dragon Medallion, a powerful relic which is said to grant one wish to its holder. These twelve each come armed with powerful weaponry, much like in *Samurai Shodown*, as well as their own piece of the Dragon Medallion. Just as in SNK's series, the game relies on timing and placing damaging single hits, rather than getting combo attacks. In fact, the game seems to take aim at SNK's fighting games in general, as the three-character team mechanic it employs is pinched wholesale from the *King Of Fighters* series and the camera scales in and out, as it does in *Art Of Fighting* as well as *Samurai Shodown*.

In a mechanic carried over from beat-'em-ups like *Streets Of Rage 2*, each fighter can utilise a unique special move for a small life cost, delivering a potentially devastating attack with a push of all three punch buttons. Additionally, each stage has hang points available, which allows characters to leap out of the fray and hang on a tree or ledge for a short while by pushing all three kick buttons. Better yet, all the bladed weaponry on offer means that those escape routes can regularly disappear as branches are cut down and light rigs fall

It's a shame that for all of its inventive gameplay, the game just doesn't have any discernable personality of its own. While none of the characters would feel tremendously out of place in SNK's aforementioned *Samurai Shodown* series, arenas have a truly homogenised feel, varying from scenes of nature to bustling urban areas. That's not to say it's a bad game, mind. A victim of poor timing for home release, no doubt – the popularity of the 2D fighter was rapidly eroding in the face of competition from the likes of *Tekken* – the game is well worth another look.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SAMURAI SHODOWN 1993

SNK's classic slash-'em-up has appeared on a wide variety of formats. Contemporary home conversions include releases for the Mega Drive, SNES and 3DO, as well as the obvious Neo Geo version. Owners of modern consoles can find it via Virtual Console, PlayStation Network or the PS2/Wii compilation *SNK Arcade Classics Vol 1*.



A HISTORY OF THE ELDER SCROLLS

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Elder Scrolls series. To celebrate two decades' worth of open worlds and fantasy lore, Matt Edwards speaks to some of the key development staff that helped turn the series into a role-playing phenomenon



» [PC] To swing a sword in *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* you had to shake the mouse from side-to-side.



» [PC] Just like the modern *Elder Scrolls* games, resting in an unsecure location can lead to an ambush.



» [PC] They may have only been released two years apart but *Daggerfall* looks much better than *Arena*.



» [PC] The first game had a lot of enemy variety – everything from Ghosts, Golems and Skeletons to Orcs, Trolls and Zombies.



If the rise of literature, cinema and even table-top gaming has taught us anything, it's that building a compelling fantasy world takes time. It took J R R Tolkien 12 years to write *The Lord Of The Rings* after his publisher asked for a sequel to *The Hobbit*, and even though George R R Martin never had to live through a World War, the waiting period between *A Feast For Crows* and *A Dance With Dragons* was close to six years. Compare the modern visions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Warhammer Fantasy* and *Warcraft* with their starting points and it's clear that even the most tangible fantasy world can evolve from the humblest of beginnings.

It's perhaps no surprise, then, that the *Elder Scrolls* series began life as a gladiatorial combat game. Today, the series is synonymous with finely detailed worlds, anthropomorphic cat-people and a sinister brotherhood that has a penchant for murdering innocents, but back when the original development team was putting a rough-and-ready concept together at Bethesda Softworks, *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* was pitched as a cross between a sports simulator and a dungeon combat game with capture-the-flag mechanics. It was to be loosely based on the Rutger Hauer film *Flesh And Blood*, but with the addition of side-quests and other role-playing elements, the development team decided to ditch the gladiator angle in favour of a more story-driven experience.

"We had a beautiful world generated by fractals, which created a new world every time you wanted to restart the game", recalls lead designer on *Arena*, Vijay Lakshman. "This way we knew the spread of possible gladiators for your team would be randomised. It was really amazing and way ahead of its time, but when we tacked on the story, it became clear we couldn't regenerate the world as the story wouldn't hang together."

Ted Peterson, a man who bagged a writing position at Bethesda after responding to an obscure advertisement in the *Washington Post*, also helped shape *Arena*. "For part of the interview, they had me write a story about a team of gladiators fighting their way through a maze," Ted explains. "We were all fantasy fans, as well as players of the computer RPGs that were popular at the time – *Ultima*, *Wizardry* and *Legends Of Valour*. There wasn't much of a story in *Arena* at first, and then we began to develop one about your character's desire for revenge against a wizard called Jagar Tharn."

By procedurally generating every environment that wasn't a key town or dungeon, *Arena* remains the largest game in *The Elder Scrolls* series. It introduced players to the nine provinces of Tamriel – including eight of the playable races that would come to define the series – and it featured everything from spell crafting to a Sorcerer class that was inspired by the infamous Stormbringer sword from the Elric of Melniboné novels. But despite the best efforts of the development team, the game missed its Christmas 1993 launch date. "The game was late and buggy," Ted reflects. "We figured there wasn't much chance of a sequel."

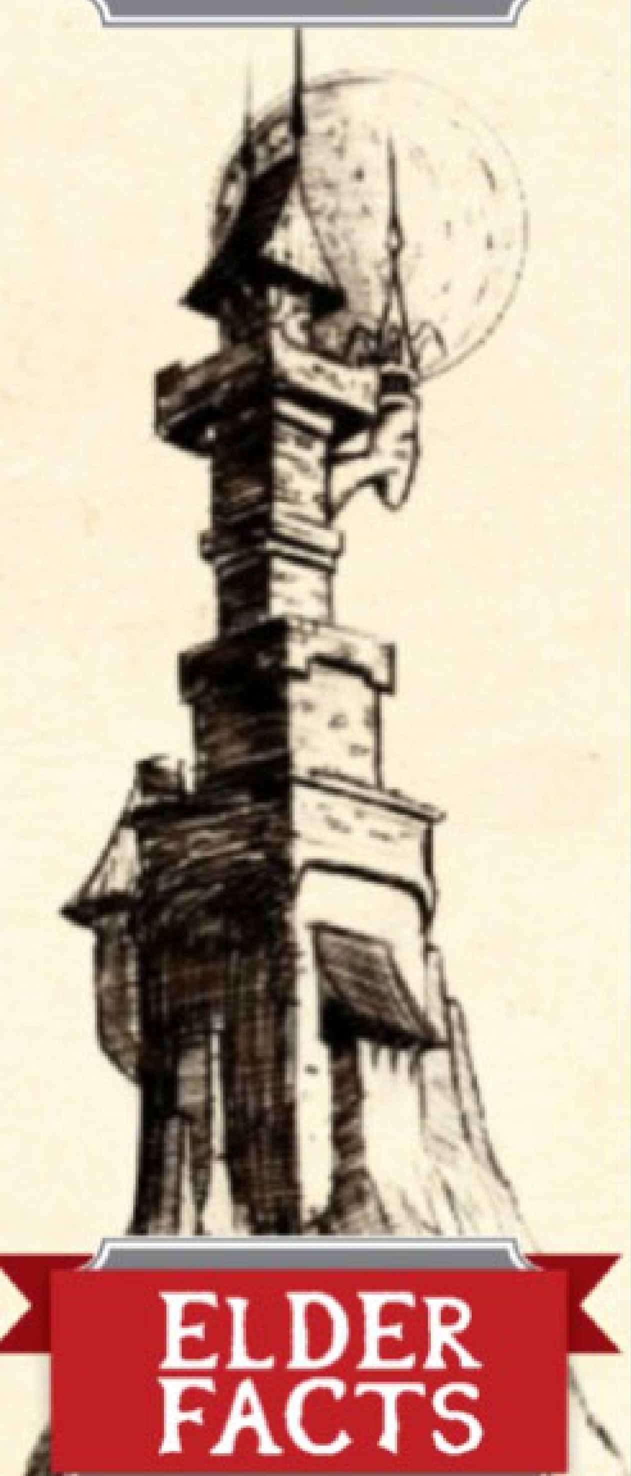
If Bethesda had called it a day at this point, the last 20 years of Western RPGs could've been very different, but thanks to encouraging sales, an *Elder Scrolls* sequel was put into motion with Ted as lead designer. "Because of the way *Arena* came together, the storyline was pretty clichéd, and I was determined that the second game would be different," Ted confesses. "I wanted a big epic adventure with a huge cast of characters whose motivations were somewhere between good and evil. I wanted the player to play the game any way they wanted and with any character. That really informed the design of the world and the systems."

Originally, *Daggerfall* had a working title of Mournhold and was going to be set in Morrowind. The location was then changed to the Hammerfell and High Rock provinces with a story that had six possible endings. "The buzzword at the time was non-linear stories," Ted describes. "It made sense to let the ▶

ELDER FACTS

BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE

■ Character creation has been a cornerstone of *The Elder Scrolls* since the very first game. *Arena* had a total of eight playable races while *Morrowind* upped the count to 10 with the Imperial and Orc.



ELDER FACTS

REWRITING THE SPELL BOOK

■ Another feature that made the first game stand out was the spell creation system. There are over 50 known spells in *Arena*, but beyond that, you're free to craft your own sorceries.

TIMELINE

The key events that shaped Tamriel

FIRST ERA

1E 0
■ King Eplear founds the Camoran Dynasty, effectively kicking off the First Era

1E 668
■ The Red Mountain erupts for the first time and blocks out the sun in the process

1E 2920
■ Morag Tong assassinates the current King, Reman III. The deed ends the First Era as a result

SECOND ERA

2E 0
■ The Dark Brotherhood is rumoured to have been formed around this time

2E 321
■ The Guilds Act is passed in Tamriel. It sanctions numerous groups from the Ratcatchers Guild to the Prostitutes Guild

2E 582
■ The events of *The Elder Scrolls Online* take place

2E 830
■ Tiber Septim, then known as Hjalti Early-Beard, is born

2E 864
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls Adventures: Redguard* take place

2E 882
■ Dagoth Ur and the Ash Vampires rise in Morrowind

2E 897
■ The Second Era ends at the behest of Tiber Septim



TIMELINE CONTINUED

THIRD ERA

3E 111
■ The Knights of the Nine are founded by Sir Amiel Lannus

3E 370
■ The Eternal Champion, the protagonist from *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, is born

3E 399
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* take place

3E 405
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall* take place

3E 427
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* take place

3E 433
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* take place

FOURTH ERA

4E 5
■ The Ministry of Truth falls from the sky and demolishes Vivec

4E 175
■ A peace treaty is finally signed between the Empire and the Aldmeri Dominion

4E 201
■ Events of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* take place



ELDER FACTS
THE MASQUERADE

■ The drawbacks sometimes outweigh the benefits, but becoming a vampire in *Daggerfall*, *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* is an interesting and organic plot twist. There is a cure, but only if you want it.

▶ player be the authority on how the game ended. We also played *Daggerfall* as a pen-and-paper RPG before it was committed to code, so the characters, world and situations had been explored quite a bit. The whole backstory of the War of Betony and the earlier tale of the Camoran Usurper were adventures we ran."

When they weren't throwing down the dice, the development team was thinking up ways to make the factions from *Arena* more integral to the gameplay and story. "The factions were part of the design from the start […] It was a matter of extrapolating what their histories and motivations would be, as well as what benefits you'd get from membership," Ted elaborates. "Including them as support was essential in our goal to let the player be as good, evil or somewhere in between as they wanted to be." And given more time, it seems the freedoms would've been even more flexible.

"We'd planned on letting you hook up with NPCs," Ted reveals when asked about the smut hidden within *Daggerfall*'s code. "Not only was there text, but there was art connected to it – pretty tasteful silhouettes of folks canoodling in bed, that kind of thing. R-rated at the worst, like the rest of the nudity that actually made it into the game. It wasn't a matter of censorship that it was taken out, though. We were just so late on our game that we knew we had to focus on the major elements, and sex was never essential to the major… thrust of the game."

Another former Bethesda employee who had a hand in *Daggerfall* was Michael Kirkbride. "My only real task was taking scans of famous paintings and *Penthouse* pinups and altering them enough so that we wouldn't get sued for using them as tapestries," Michael reflects. "To this day, I think altering a 64x64 pixel Girl with a Pearl Earring into an Argonian princess is a highlight of my career. I also drew the ire of Julian LeFey [project leader on *Daggerfall*] by putting clothes on all the pinup girls. He […] wanted live-action cutscenes of people having intercourse to play whenever you got married or hired a prostitute."

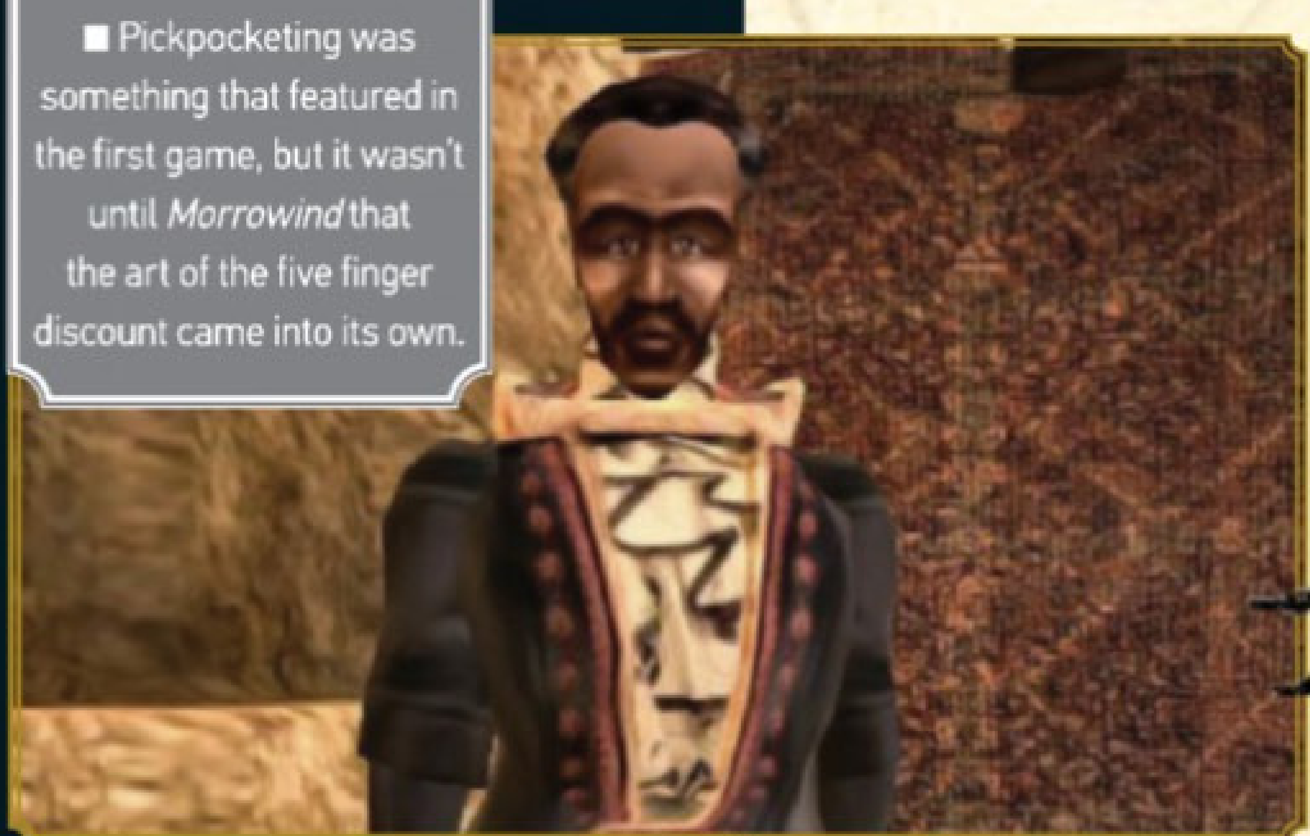
History will attest that no such prostitution mechanic ever made it into *Daggerfall*, but as risqué as the idea was, Vijay Lakshman describes Julian LeFey as both a "mad genius" and a "one-man powerhouse who could literally rewrite entire sections of a game to work correctly." It was this mix of creative thinking and technical expertise that led to *Daggerfall* being released in 1996 – complete with a procedurally generated world that rivalled *Arena* in scope; a story that focused on an ancient golem called the Numidium; and the opportunity to become a vampire, werewolf and even a wereboar.

Following the success of *Daggerfall*, Bethesda started work on three separate projects that were all set in the *Elder Scrolls* universe. The first was originally conceived as an expansion pack called *Dungeon Of Daggerfall: Battlespire*, but as the scope grew to include a dimension hopping storyline that saw the player facing off against



ELDER FACTS
THE REAL STEAL

■ Pickpocketing was something that featured in the first game, but it wasn't until *Morrowind* that the art of the five finger discount came into its own.



ELDER FACTS
WE KNOW…

■ Killing NPCs isn't a big deal in most games, but should you murder someone in cold blood in the land of Tamriel, you may be asked to join a very exclusive club.





Mehrunes Dagon – the same Daedric Prince that would later feature in *Oblivion* – the game was reworked into a standalone title. It's often regarded as the weakest entry in the series – partly due to its narrow focus – but its unusual multiplayer features also makes it one of the most daring.

If *Battlespire* is the black sheep of *The Elder Scrolls* family then *Redguard* is its equally quirky yet more successful cousin. "*Redguard* was the game that created the *Elder Scrolls* world as we know it today," Michael states, "specifically because Kurt [Kuhlmann] and I wrote *The Pocket Guide To The Empire* to ship alongside it. It was the first sourcebook detailing the whole cosmology, mythology and cultural identities of the world's various races. Khajiit Skooma-addicts; Argonians worshipping sentient trees; the Dwemer as inexplicable mathemagicians who could divide by zero to remove themselves from existence; and the Nords' use of the Thu'um – these were all born during *Redguard*'s development."

As an action-adventure spin-off, *Redguard* didn't follow the same structure as its predecessors, but while the third-person perspective



» [PC] Even after kitting your character out with the best gear in *Daggerfall*, gold could still be spent on houses and ships.



ELDER FACTS

WELCOME TO SEYDA NEEN

■ The island of Vvardenfell may be minuscule compared to the procedurally generated continents of *Arena* and *Daggerfall*, but the detail and depth it offers is on an entirely different level.

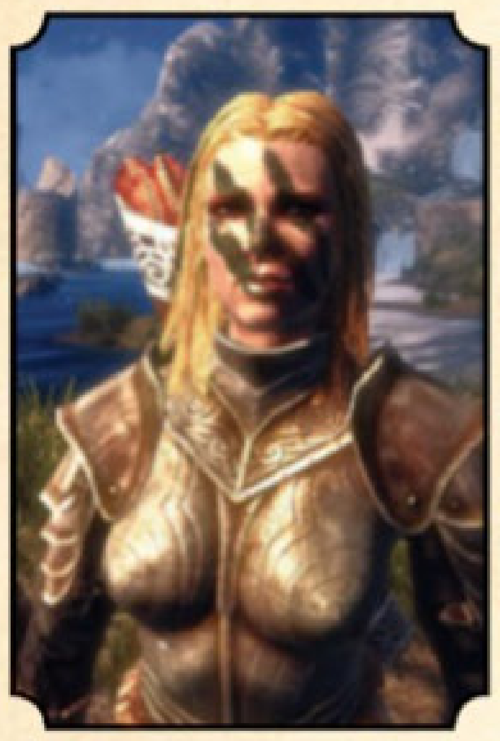
set it apart, Cyrus was the biggest surprise. "In 1997, it was a hard sell to have a black male as the star of a videogame, especially one that wasn't a racial stereotype," Michael reflects. "I doubt anyone in the upper-echelons of Bethesda will admit that we had to fight for Cyrus not to be a white guy. It's sad that almost 20 years later, the industry is still resistant to the notion of having a person of colour as a protagonist."

Following *Redguard*'s release in 1998, it took Bethesda another four years of development before *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* was finally finished. The game was originally conceived as a sequel to *Daggerfall*, one that would encompass the whole *Morrowind* province. This was later narrowed down to the Isle of Vvardenfell after Bethesda decided to ditch the procedurally generated content in favour of more detailed environments and more fleshed out characters. Todd Howard took charge as project leader, while Ken Rolston, an award-winning designer of table RPGs and former high-school teacher, who, in his own words, "had the soul of a bureaucrat and knew how to handle restless youth", took the mantle of lead designer.

"When I arrived at Bethesda, I briefly worked on an early pre-production phase for *Morrowind*," Ken recalls, when asked about the original concept. "I don't recall any discussion about building all of *Morrowind* […] I suspect that Todd ▶

HALL OF HEROES

A selection of famous names that have appeared in The Elder Scrolls



LYNDA CARTER
GORMLAITH GOLDEN-HILT

■ Known for portraying Wonder Woman in the Seventies, Lynda Carter voiced the Nord and Orc females in both *Morrowind* and *Oblivion*. She also voiced Gormlaith Golden-Hilt and Azura in *Skyrim*. Her husband, Robert Altman, is the current CEO and chairman of ZeniMax Media.



SEAN BEAN
MARTIN SEPTIM

■ When it comes to national treasures, few English actors are more decorated than Sean Bean. He played Alec Trevelyan in *GoldenEye*, Boromir in *The Lord Of The Rings* and Eddard Stark in *Game Of Thrones*. He also voiced the equally ill-fated Martin Septim in *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.



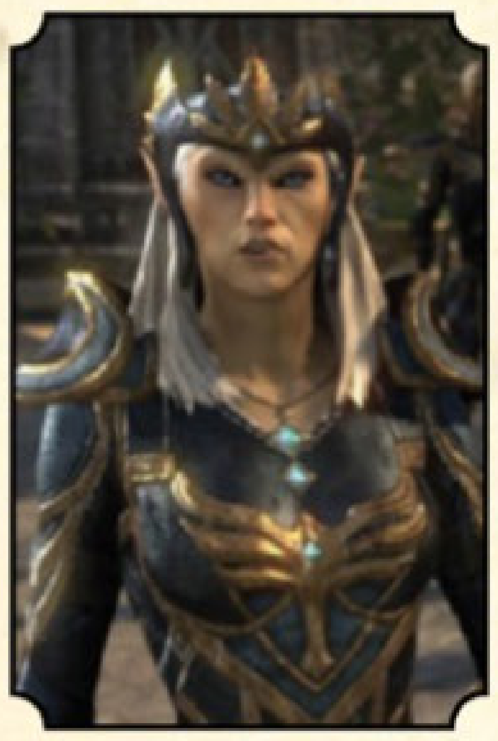
CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER
ARNGEIR THE GREYBEARD

■ There aren't many games that can boast Oscar-winning talent but *Skyrim* is one of them. Christopher Plummer, the voice behind Arngeir the Greybeard, won the 2012 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in *Beginners*.



JOHN CLEESE
SIR CADWELL

■ The range of voice talent that was brought on for *The Elder Scrolls Online* is, quite frankly, ridiculous. But while picking between the likes of Bill Nighy, Michael Gambon and Malcolm McDowell is no easy task, Monty Python co-founder, John Cleese, is the clear standout. He voices the eccentric Sir Cadwell.



KATE BECKINSALE
QUEEN AYRENN

■ There's a running joke that the women in the *Elder Scrolls* series tend to look strangely masculine. Was this perhaps the reason why Bethesda chose to cast Kate Beckinsale as the voice of Queen Ayrenn in *The Elder Scrolls Online*? Probably not, but it definitely gives the character more in the way of femininity.



MAX VON SYDOW
ESBERN

■ As an Academy Award nominee who played Father Lankester Merrin in *The Exorcist* and Ming the Merciless in *Flash Gordon*, Max von Sydow was brought on for *Skyrim*. He voices Esbern, the last of the Blades. Max has also secured a role in the forthcoming *Star Wars Episode VII*.





ELDER FACTS

OUT OF THIS WORLD

■ Just when you thought you were starting to get your bearings, *The Elder Scrolls IV* throws you a curve ball in the form of the Oblivion gates. What lies beyond is a living hell.

▶ Howard was responsible for that decision. By the time I was working on *Morrowind*, it was all about Vvardenfell. I can confidently assert that nothing but the wacky concept art and mad ravings of Michael Kirkbride survived the earlier notions of a larger Morrowind."

"I was the art director on *Morrowind* and, with Kurt and Ken, one of its chief world-builders," Michael explains. "If *Daggerfall* was a classical medieval romance, then *Morrowind* was going to be the stranger in a strange land story. My elevator pitch to Todd Howard was *Mad Max* meets *Star Wars* meets *The Dark Crystal*. That, coupled with the fact that Kurt had written up scores of notes on its setting and I'd drawn up hundreds of pictures of what it would look like during *Redguard*'s development, made it an easy sell." It also beat *Fable* and *Knights Of The Old Republic* to become the best-selling RPG on the original Xbox.

The game told a story about the reincarnation of an ancient hero and his (or her) struggle against the malevolent Dagoth Ur and a mysterious disease called The Blight. But as engaging as the narrative was, Pete Hines, VP of PR and marketing at Bethesda Softworks, believes *Morrowind* had a deeper strength. "The focus was less about the story and more about the world," Pete says. "What's going on in this world? Who are the people that live there? What groups do they belong to? *Morrowind* wasn't a big hit because of its story. It was a hit because it offered freedom."

It also offered a fantasy world that was entirely its own. "People don't really notice that all native fauna of Vvardenfell have huge under-bites, since magical evolution would have dictated several species having to scoop food out of the ashen wastes," Michael ponders. "It was a conscious decision to make Red Mountain, the volcano at the heart of the subcontinent, very different than Mount Doom. Where the latter was a deadly destination of all evil, we were devoted to making Red Mountain a place of weird reverence and a multidimensional axis mundi for all of the disparate cultures involved in the game world."

With so many creative personalities working together over a six year period, it's hardly surprising that every aspect of the game was discussed at length. "We'd debate over details on everything," Michael admits. "The Dunmer equivalent of the assassin's guild, the Morag Tong, would be a recognised part of noble society to prevent outright warfare, borrowing heavily from Frank Herbert's 'rights of kanly' concept. And a native society who openly accepted a hermaphroditic, pan-sexual warrior-poet, Vivec, as their highest god while also having strict sexual taboos at every caste level would have thousands of years to generate just how those conflicts would work."

And even when the team couldn't agree on the finer details, things had a habit of working out anyway. "Ironically, I fought tooth and nail with Todd against *Morrowind*'s brilliant character creation section," Ken Rolston laughs when asked about one of the series' most iconic features. "He was right, and I was wrong. I thought it would be a train-wreck trying to combine an opening narrative, a tutorial and character creation. It was a complete nightmare but Todd just went ahead and made it work." Not only that, he and the team ditched the soulless expanse of the past games for genuine depth.

With a sudden surge in popularity, Bethesda didn't waste any time in giving players more doses of Tamriel. Some of these were pocket-sized, as was the case with *The Elder Scrolls Travels* series that ran on Java-enabled mobile phones from 2003 to 2006, while others were fully-fledged expansion packs. "*Tribunal* was mostly just stitching scraps and theme elements left over from making *Morrowind*," Ken confesses. "*Bloodmoon*, on the other hand, was more ambitious and challenging. It was a full-scale RPG game in itself, and Mark Nelson deserves most of the credit for making it so much fun."

If *Morrowind* is the game that stopped the *Elder Scrolls* series from being fairly niche then *Oblivion* is the one that turned it into a household name. It remains one



» [PC] *Redguard* was the first *Elder Scrolls* game to enforce a third-person perspective. This gave it a more *Tomb Raider*-esque presentation.



ELDER FACTS

TWIST AND DRAGON SHOUT

■ Anyone who's played *Skyrim* for a while will know the phrase "Fus Ro Dah!" It's the first of many powerful Dragon Shouts that can be learned in the game.



» [PC] In *Battlespire*, players could team up to tackle the story together. It also featured a competitive battle mode.



ELDER FACTS

ARE WE THERE YET?

■ As the series' personal Everest, The Throat of the World stands proudly as the tallest mountain in Tamriel. Legend has it that 7,000 steps lead to High Hrothgar near the summit, but in truth, it's only 748.

of the most ambitious RPGs ever made with a map that's over 20 square miles in size and filled with over 200 dungeons, nine major cities and over 50 hours of voiced dialogue. And in terms of people who saw it go from a rough concept to a functioning kingdom, few have more insight than the aforementioned Mark Nelson – writer and quest designer on *Morrowind* and *Oblivion*.

"I remember one of the earliest meetings for *Oblivion*," Mark recalls when asked about the team's initial goals. "Todd Howard announced we weren't shooting for RPG of the year, we were only going to be happy with game of the year. It would be set in Cyrodiil and Oblivion, the player would be Lancelot instead of King Arthur, there would always be a point of interest on the player's compass and horses would be ride-able. The first three were good ideas. But horses? Not so much."

Ken describes *Oblivion*'s development as a "Sunday stroll in the park" compared to *Morrowind*, but that doesn't mean it was all plain sailing. "The main quest went through a painful rewriting process", Mark reflects. "Originally, it focused more on making Martin into the Emperor. He began the game as nearly feral, and the player had to teach him how to eat and speak. It was ambitious but too complex, so all the designers sat in a conference room for a week and rewrote the whole thing." The end result was a living world that surprised the development team just as much as the gamers who played it.

"One day, when I started up a new build of *Oblivion*, I was surprised to discover lots of sheep hanging around on the landscape just outside a dungeon", Ken reminisces. "The combat AI had been changed so that fleeing people and creatures would try to hide indoors when something terrified them. This made sense for human behaviour but was very confusing for animals. Their intelligence scores weren't even high enough for them to get through the doors. I remember thinking how disappointed the sheep would be when they found out what was inside an *Oblivion* dungeon."

> **"We weren't shooting for RPG of the year, we were only going to be happy with game of the year"**
> Mark Nelson

Thankfully, disappointment wasn't something that befell the team as launch drew closer. "We were working 100-hour weeks when, out of the blue, Todd announced a surprise offsite meeting for the team at the hotel next door," Mark remembers. "There was no question we were all being laid off. The 100-yard walk to the hotel was the longest, most pathetic thing you can imagine. Turned out, it was a big motivational talk. Todd had randomly asked each of us weeks earlier what title we'd have if we could choose anything. At the meeting, he gave us cards with those titles on them. I was God of Thunder."

Following the game's launch back in 2006, fans have debated about which game is superior – *Morrowind* or *Oblivion*. But it seems that even among the development team, the winner is far from clear. "*Oblivion* is far better software, a far better user experience, and more polished and consistent," Ken surmises. "But I will always be partial to *Morrowind*." Michael Kirkbride, on the other hand, views *Oblivion* as a step backwards: "One day *Oblivion* will be written off as a big, *Lord Of The Rings*-obsessed, poison-induced fever dream of Uriel VII during the final moments of his life."

The argument is further complicated by *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, an admittedly modern game that not only lives up to the series' open-ended legacy, but stands as the most detailed entry to date. And when you also consider *The Elder Scrolls Online*, a game that's only a few months old, the future of the series seems certain. "Creating an MMO is a different experience," Pete ponders. "We felt it would require a team of folks with considered experience making MMOs. We created and built that team with ZeniMax Online Studios so that Bethesda Game Studios could continue focusing on the kind of games it excels at."

Those games are undoubtedly single-player RPGs, the kind that lavish more mystery and intrigue per square mile than most other games can dream of, and whether it's the way your eyes adjust to the sunlight after emerging from the dank sewers of Cyrodiil or just the thrill of turning a whole town into random monsters after finding the Wabbajack staff in *Daggerfall*, every *Elder Scrolls* fan has their favourite moment. Some of these moments are shared through the central quest while others are personalised through the heightened sense of freedom and the depth of the world, but all of them are built upon the hard work of many talented and forward-thinking designers.

"I remember reading a later review calling *Daggerfall* a massively single-player game, which I thought was a solid summary," Ted surmises. "The design philosophy of letting the player loose on the stage as a catalyst for action hasn't changed since the beginning, and even though the graphics of 20 years ago look very dated, they were cutting edge at the time, and that's continued to this day." It's hard to say if the *Elder Scrolls* series will still be as relevant in another double decade, but so long as it doesn't lose sight of one of the bravest fantasy settings in gaming, it seems sure to prosper. *

ELDER FACTS

TOP DOG

■ *The Elder Scrolls Online* currently has a level cap of 50 and a veteran cap of 12, but for those who want to hit the top, becoming a campaign Emperor is the ultimate accolade.



THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO TAMRIEL

IMPORTANT INDIVIDUALS:

1. JAGAR THARN
IMPERIAL CITY
2. KING LYSANDUS DAGGERFALL
3. FAOLCHU THE UNDEAD WEREWOLF
CAMLORN
4. FIGHTERS GUILD
WAYREST
5. QUEEN BIANKI
GILANE
6. KING LHOTUN
SENTINEL
7. QUEEN BLUBAMKA
RIHAD
8. JARL SKALD THE ELDER
DAWNSTAR
9. FANARI STRONG-VOICE
SKAAL VILLAGE
10. MASTER WIZARD NELOTH
SADRITH MORA
11. DAGOTH UR
MORROWIND
12. KING HELSETH HLAALU
MOURNHOLD
13. JORUNN THE SKALD KING
STORMHOLD
14. QUEEN HELLENA
LILMOTH
15. COUNTESS NARINA CARVAIN
BRUMA
16. COUNTESS ARRIANA VALGA
CHORROL
17. MARTIN SEPTIM
KVATCH
18. COUNT JANUS HASSILDOR
SKINGRAD
19. MAGISTER VOTH KARLYSS
CORINTH
20. THE MANE
TORVAL
21. S'RATHRA
SENCHAL
22. TREETHANE FARIEL
WOODHEARTH
23. VANUS GALERION FIRSTHOLD
24. QUEEN AYRENN
ALINOR





MAJOR LOCATIONS:

25. HALL OF THE VIRTUES OF WAR
SKAVEN

26. THIEVES GUILD
RIFTEN

27. THE COMPANIONS
WHITERUN

28. CALIXTO'S HOUSE OF CURIOSITIES
WINDHELM

29. THE COLLEGE OF WINTERHOLD
WINTERHOLD

30. RED MOUNTAIN
VVARDENFELL

31. REDORAN COUNCIL CHAMBER
ALD'RUHN

32. MAGES GUILD
BALMORA

33. MINISTRY OF TRUTH
VIVEC

34. HOUSE DRES
TEAR

35. SHADOWSCALE TRAIN FACILITY
BLACKWOOD

36. DARK BROTHERHOOD SANCTUARY
CHEYDINHAL

37. WHITE GOLD TOWER
IMPERIAL CITY

38. GREAT CHAPEL OF ZENITHAR
LEYAWIIN

39. HALL OF THE COLOSSUS
RIMMEN

40. CAMORAN THRONE
FALINESTI

41. ELDEN TREE
ELDEN ROOT

42. MOUNT ETON NIR
CLOUDREST

43. BLACKROSE PRISON
BLACKROSE

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BLACKWOOD

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ROAD BLASTERS



Atari's 1987 coin-op spliced together racing and blasting to create an exciting arcade experience. Darran Jones straps on a helmet and revisits the hit futuristic blaster

Atari's frantic arcade game has had gamers wondering for generations if its futuristic adrenaline-fuelled gameplay was in anyway inspired by Mel Gibson's trilogy of classic *Mad Max* movies. After all, it's easy to see where these comparisons originated. Both *Mad Max* and *RoadBlasters* feature bleak dystopian settings and combine high-speed racing with over-the-top weaponry. Surely Atari's game couldn't have come from anywhere else? "*Mad Max*? I thoroughly enjoyed *The Road Warrior* – a ▶

PIXEL PERFECT

Your instant guide to the key vehicles and weapons found in Atari's apocalyptic videogame



» [Arcade] Later stages are incredibly tough, relying on good handling skills instead of an itchy trigger finger.



» [Arcade] Explosions certainly look awesome, but they do cost you precious fuel points.

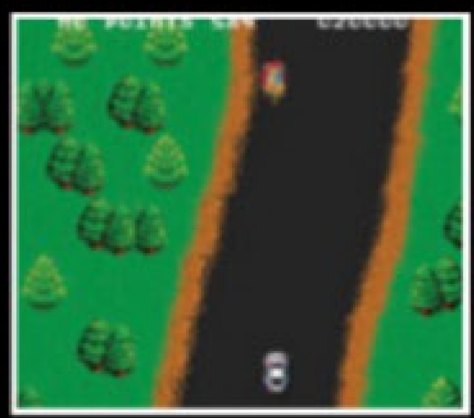


» [Arcade] It may have been built on aging hardware, but *RoadBlasters* was still very impressive.



SPEED DEMONS

RoadBlasters wasn't the only game to combine high-speed thrills with hi-octane action…



Spy Hunter 1983

Bally Midway's hit top-down racer partly inspired Atari's *RoadBlasters*, so it's only fair that it gets featured here. It still holds up as a superb racing game that sees you transforming between a car and boat as you attempt to outmanoeuvre and outgun your opponents. Oh, and the theme tune is amazing.



Battle Cars 1993

The Mode 7 is impressive, but this is an otherwise dull effort considering you're speeding around picking off other vehicles with overpowered weaponry. A game that's both fast and bland at the same time, which is quite an achievement when you think about it.



Carmageddon 1997

As if we'd forget this bloodthirsty racer. Controversy at the time may have caused Stainless Games to switch out humans for zombies, but there was no denying the amount of violence you could revel in. Stay away from the N64 port though.



Overlander 1988

A lot of computer owners prefer this to the home ports of *RoadBlasters*, and it's easy to see why. It's fast paced, has a nice variety of weaponry, a clear structure and looks extremely impressive (unless you're an Amstrad CPC owner). Consider it to be the thinking man's *RoadBlasters*.



Rock 'N' Roll Racing 1993

This racer from an early Blizzard is notable for its multiplayer action, neatly designed isometric tracks and a great soundtrack. Loading up your truck with an insane arsenal of deadly weaponry and unleashing them on your opponents never gets old.



Action Fighter 1986

We have a lot of love for Sega's 1986 coin-op, and not just because the car you drive on some stages looks like Thunderhawk from hit Eighties cartoon *MASK*. It's a fast-paced shooter letting you unleash your fury whilst riding a variety of different vehicles.

▶ 90-minute, non-stop adrenaline rush! However, I don't remember the idea for *RoadBlasters* coming from the *Mad Max* films." We've managed to catch Lyle Rains in a reflective mood and he finally scratches an itch that has been troubling us – and, we're sure, many others – for a good 25 years. "The concept was a simple 'shoot the obstacles, collect the treasures' driving game; a context-free mash-up of other games, without any backstory. The tie-in with Mattel's Matchbox *RoadBlasters* toys (and hence, the game name) came fairly late in development. I do not know if the toys had some inspiration from *Mad Max*, but it is quite possible."

For Lyle Rains *RoadBlasters*' birth was mainly about being a good business plan for Atari, with FutureVette (as *RoadBlasters* was then known) coming about as the bastard child of *Pole Position* and *Spy Hunter*, two very popular games of the time. Both titles had been extremely successful, so a game that combined the two was a no-brainer. It also helped that the general success of driving games meant that Atari usually had one or two in development, typically using Atari's cheap tried and tested System 1 hardware.

"Driving games had been going toward specialised, high-end hardware which was expensive to develop and had a high price with lower sales volumes," continues Lyle. "I thought we could do a reasonable first-person driver/shooter on our cheap hardware to fill a market gap at the lower end."

A development team was quickly assembled, which consisted of Robert Weatherby, Bonnie Smithson, Mark Pierce and Dave Wiebenson. You can read about their exploits creating Lyle's vision in issue 75, but the goals were achieved, with Lyle confirming to us: "They did a great job!"

The beauty of *RoadBlasters* lies in its slick risk and reward mechanics that will really push you on later levels. You start each game with a tank of fuel and a reserve tank and must progress as far as possible through 50 hazard-strewn levels. Each stage has a handy checkpoint that rewards you with additional fuel, while you can also top up your tank by picking up the green fuel orbs that float along the track. Additionally, red orbs are also available, but are only found in destroyed cars. While you'll initially want to simply weave through incoming traffic, you soon realise that you'll need to be pretty handy with your trigger finger if you want to complete some of *RoadBlasters*' later stages. In fact, some of *RoadBlasters* can't be completed without those red orbs, meaning you'll want to mow down as many enemies as you can.

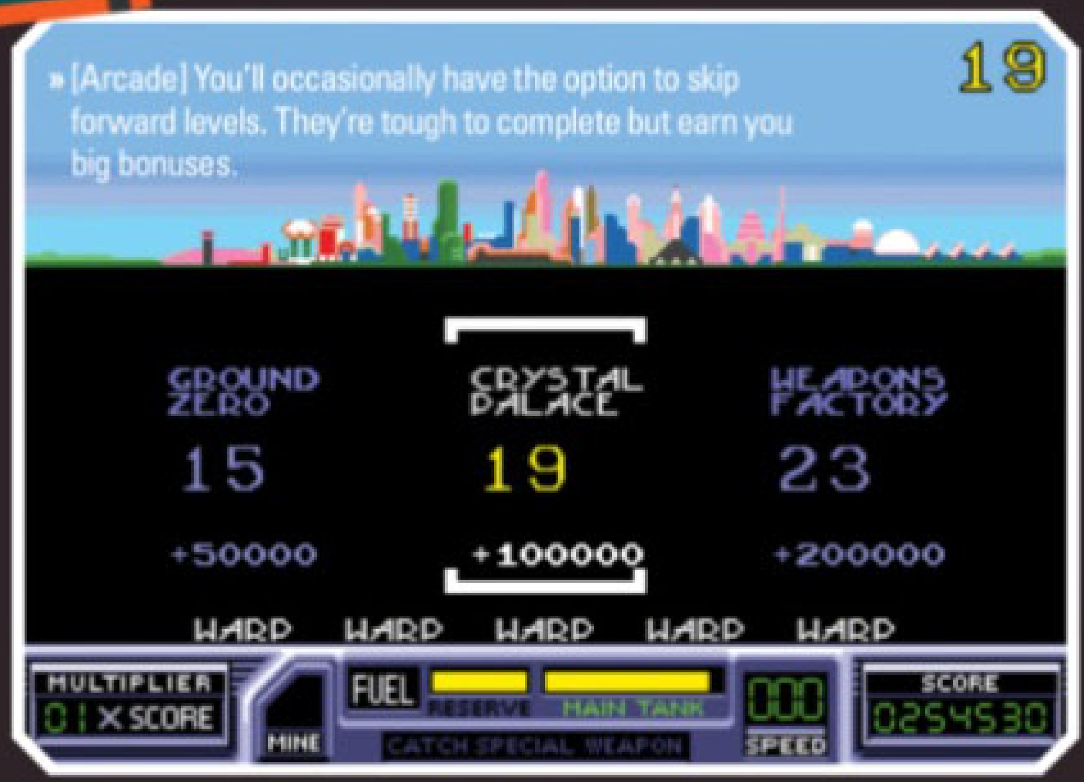
You'll certainly have a tough time though, because there's quite a lot of variety found in the vehicles of the future. Man may have decimated the planet, but he's still found time to create a selection of cool vehicles to



» [Arcade] The supply jets drop off game-changing power-ups, but you'll need to catch them first…



» [Arcade] Green Stingers drop annoying bombs that will bounce across to other lanes.



» [Arcade] You'll occasionally have the option to skip forward levels. They're tough to complete but earn you big bonuses.

tear up the highways with. Yellow Stingers are fairly basic, doing little more than getting in your way and acting as handy cannon fodder. Purple Command Cars on the other hand need a little more thought, as they're imperious to your standard bullets, meaning you'll only be able to take them out with certain power-ups that are occasionally dropped off by the support jet. Cycles are fast and mobile, effortlessly able to weave out of the way of your fire, while Rat Jeeps like to approach from behind and hopefully take you out with a kamikaze-style kill. Finally there are the Green Stingers that mix things up by dropping annoying bouncing spike mines that happily switch lanes just when you think you've avoided them. Add in additional hazards in the forms of land mines, toxic spills and roadside gun turrets and you'll find simply getting through a stage can become a monumental task.

You'll stick with it though as you always feel that the fault lies with you and not the controls (a cool futuristic looking steering wheel). Except for level 14. Level 14 is a real sod to complete. It's the first of several stages that expect you to complete it with only half a fuel tank and you'll need to hit virtually every red orb in order to continue. It's one of the few sticking points *RoadBlasters* has, and it is stages like this where its arcade origins become painfully obvious. Atari wanted your money and levels like level 14 allowed it to reap your pockets until they were completely empty.

Play *RoadBlasters* properly however – by which we mean shoot every damned thing that moves – and things start to become a lot easier. *RoadBlasters'* scoring system is resoundingly solid, giving you a x1 multiplier (up to a total of 10) for every enemy you destroy. Your multiplier drops by a point with each missed opponent, leaving you to be handsomely rewarded at the end of each stage. In addition to scoring big on points you'll also be rewarded with reserve fuel, making it that little bit easier to reach the next stage.

RoadBlasters also gets more manageable if you're able to grab the power-ups that occasionally drop down from support jets. Successfully dock and you'll earn speed boosts, a highly improved rate of fire, shields and even the ability to create nuclear explosions that destroy virtually everything else on the track. The power-ups are well placed so that you'll always go out of your way to catch them, even if it means potentially crashing into a nearby enemy. It's a further example of the risk versus reward found at *RoadBlasters'* core and it works exceptionally well.

Gameplay mechanics aside, *RoadBlasters* still works today because it's just fantastic fun to play. Its success was echoed in the home with a number of ports for both the 8-bit and 16-bit computers, as well as consoles like the NES, Mega Drive and Lynx appearing from 1988 onwards. Sadly the ports themselves were wildly inconsistent, meaning the best way to enjoy this classic blaster is still in its original form.



» [Arcade] Over-steer or hit a toxic spill and you'll spin out, wasting precious fuel in the process.

> **"Driving games had been going toward specialised, high-end hardware which was expensive to develop"**
> Lyle Rains

WEAPON OF CHOICE
RoadBlasters' power-ups and what they do



UZ Cannon
Sometimes front-mounted guns simply can't do the business. Turn the tables with this ridiculous strap-on Uzi that fires 1,000 bullets a second tearing apart your opponents like a knife slicing through hot butter. Don't leave home without it.



Electro Shield
It's dangerous on the roads of the future, so you're going to want to make sure you're packing this durable Electro Shield. Built from the world's strongest materials it lets you pass through enemies like a ghost, sustaining you for three total hits.



Nitro Injector
The need for speed was good enough for Tom Cruise so it can be good enough for you. A simple stab of this powerful accelerator will let you travel at speeds of at least a bazillion miles per hour. Damn it's fast.



Cruise Missile
If you're looking for the ultimate weapon of devastation accept no other substitutes. This stupidly powerful missile will set off a nuclear explosion that will allow you to pass through vehicles. You'll still die to mines though.

DAVID LOOKER INTERVIEW

We speak to the man behind the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad conversions



How did you get the job converting *RoadBlasters*?
I'd done several road racing games before, including *Super Cycle* (CPC), *ElectraGlide* (CPC) and *Nigel Mansell's GP* (Spectrum/CPC), plus I'd had quite a bit of contact with US Gold through developing and applying the Speedlock protection system, for them and Ocean Software.

Had you had any experience with the coin-op original beforehand?
Probably – I was a big fan of arcade racers from *Pole Position* onwards.

How long did it take you to complete and did you have access to the arcade machine?
I think it was about eight months, but can't be sure… Yes, US Gold lent us a machine, which was great fun!

What was the biggest challenge you faced from a technical point of view?
Getting the performance (frame rate) up to a satisfactory level, especially when a lot was going on. Some of the effects were quite challenging too.

Is there anything you had to miss out of the original game?
Hmm, can't remember… I don't think too much was missed.

Did you have any involvement with any of the other versions?
No, just Speccy and Amstrad CPC.

Which version do you feel is better and why?
I always liked the Amstrad CPC versions of my game conversions the best, because the colour modes allowed a closer approximation to the original arcade version, without the attribute clash problems of the Speccy.

Were you not at all tempted to do a straight Z80 port like so many other Spectrum to Amstrad conversions?
NO!!! See my answer above… it's a crime to waste the features of a more capable machine just to make the conversion easier.

Where you pleased with the positive reviews at the time?
Of course!

CONVERSION CAPERS

Your guide to the best and worst RoadBlasters ports…



Commodore 64

This is the worst conversion we've played. Visually it's ugly with blocky visuals, an erratic frame rate and poor colours. The car also shudders up and down which is very distracting. Add in some dull sound and twitchy controls and the C64 version falls far behind its 8-bit opposition.



Amstrad

David's Amstrad port effortlessly captures the bright colour design of the original. It's fast too, with impressively slick scrolling, although the vehicles are admittedly a little more sluggish. It plays fine though, which is the most important part, but is let down by poor spot effects.



NES

Master System owners missed out on a *RoadBlasters* port, leaving those with a NES to have all the fun. Programmed by Beam Software, it's a very fun port as well with a great sensation of speed and decent visuals. Your car feels a little twitchy at first, but you soon get used to it.



Mega Drive

For many this is the best port of Atari's game. It replicates almost all aspects of the original game, including its visuals and music and offers an excellent rendition of the arcade game's superfast scrolling. The controls are also brilliant, allowing you to weave through incoming traffic with ease.



Amiga

The Amiga version appears to be extremely similar to the Atari ST outing, which means it's pretty poor. Jerky scrolling, dodgy collision detection and unexciting music all combine to create a rather insipid port that feels like it was coded in a weekend. The mouse controls are nice though.



ZX Spectrum

It's not as colourful as the other 8-bit ports, but it does cram in a surprising amount of detail. It runs at a very fine pace as well, doing a strong job of capturing the speed of the arcade game. The controls are responsive and it has all the key weapons from its arcade parent. A solid conversion.





Atari ST

We're not sure what's happened here but this is a pretty poor effort from Probe. It certainly looks the part, with big sprites that do an impressive job of channelling the original, but it's sluggish to control, which becomes a real problem on later levels. One nice touch is the use of a mouse.



Atari Lynx

This is the only handheld port of *RoadBlasters*, but what a port it is. Yes it suffers in the sound department, but graphically it's really quite something. The scrolling is fast, while the sprites look great. The controls are perfect as well, effortlessly capturing the pace of the arcade original.



Sony PlayStation

RoadBlasters even made it to PlayStation, where it received an arcade-perfect port. The PlayStation's pad isn't quite as responsive as the arcade yoke, but in terms of conversions you're not going to get better than this. Similar ports have also cropped up on GameCube, Xbox, PS2 and PC.

D SCOTT WILLIAMSON INTERVIEW

Find out why the Atari Lynx conversion is so good



How did you come to work on *Roadblasters*?

I started at Atari in 1987. I was hired to work on Sega Genesis games if you can believe it. When the STe came out I developed tools and *White Water Madness* with my mentor Ed Schneider. Shortly after *White Water Madness* shipped Atari acquired the Lynx from Epyx. We also had the rights to a number of coin-op properties from Atari Games, which at that time had split from Atari Computer Corporation. I selected *RoadBlasters*, partly because I liked the game and partly because I could clearly see how I would use the Lynx hardware to make a faithful port.

Had you played it beforehand?

Yeah, I loved it. Like my all-time favourite game *Quantum*, you could play it with one hand with a beverage in the other hand. I still play *Quantum* regularly.

What access, if any, did you have to the original coin-op?

There was a coin-op right next to my desk. We used it to record the digitised sound effects and voice "Fuel level critical!". I also received a large amount of the C source code to the game in printout form. I used the source code for the placement of all the objects on the track, the colours of the sky and road boarders, and to a limited extent to determine how the game worked.

Why did *RoadBlasters* work so well on the Atari Lynx?

The Lynx and *RoadBlasters* are both sprite-based and the arcade did not have too many sprites. The Lynx being able to display large sprites also helped for explosions and larger special effects. What was vitally important to a pseudo-3D game like *RoadBlasters* is that the sprites were able to be scaled. Where it got tricky was the number of colours on the screen and rendering the curving road. The Lynx can only natively display 16 colours from a 512-colour palette, *RoadBlasters* displays around 50 colours on one screen as I recall, but no more than 16 per line. The way it is done is the colours are changed at the end of every horizontal line which allowed me to get the nice sky gradient and all the road markings are done by changing colours of stripes in a stack of one-pixel tall sprites that each slide left and right as the road curves. The road slices never move towards the player, they stay the same scale and just slide back and forth – it's the colour cycling that creates the illusion of forward motion.

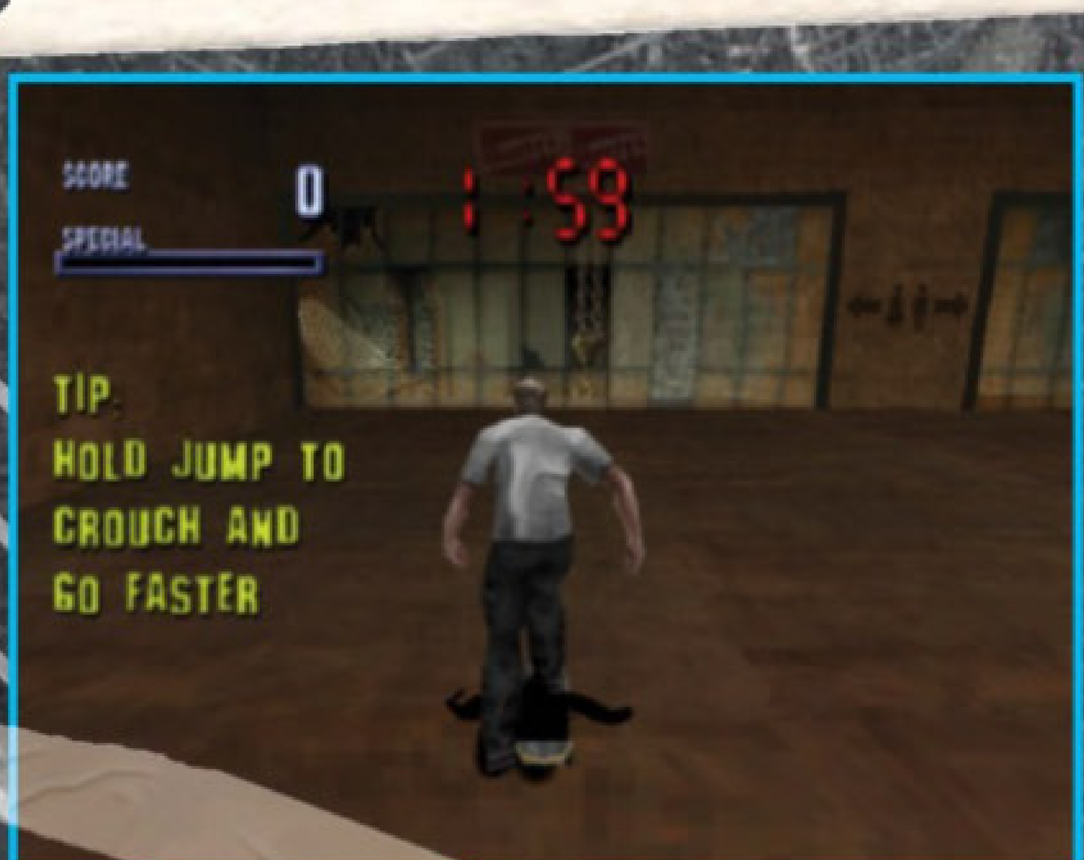
Are you pleased it's regarded as one of the Lynx's best conversions?

Of course – it was the first game I completed on my own and when I finally saw it featured in the Sears catalogue 'Wishbook' I literally cried I was so happy. I'm still super proud of it.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

A precursor to the Jackass generation headlined by an upcoming sports icon, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater not only heralded a new type of videogame genre but signalled the arrival of an entire culture. Looking back at where it all began, Neversoft co-founder Mick West discusses the humble origins of one of the biggest franchises of all time









» [PlayStation] Neversoft didn't completely abandon the idea of linear downhill courses. Two of the main stages – Mall and Downhill Jam – retain the original concept inspired by Sega's *Top Skater.*

In 1999, as publisher Activision was circling the idea of an extreme sports title, pro skaterboarder Tony Hawk peered over the edge of a half-pipe at the X-Games tournament in San Francisco, bracing himself as he prepared to attempt one of the sport's most complicated tricks: the 900. An aerial spin involving two-and-a-half turns, this was skateboarding's Holy Grail at the time, residing just out of reach even to the sport's most distinguished competitors.

When the 32-year-old Hawk landed the trick, in an instant it became one of the most talked about sporting moments of the year. It successfully raised the global profile of both Hawk and skateboarding overnight. The world took notice. Activision had found its next sports game.

Sensing the impending boom of extreme sports culture and identifying a niche in the games industry, several marketing executives at Activision came to the conclusion that a skateboarding game would be a sure-fire hit with a young demographic. What it didn't have was a studio to make it a reality.

"We were the natural choice to do it," responds Neversoft co-founder Mick West when asked how the studio got involved with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater.* "We were just finishing up *Apocalypse* and they wanted to use us for something else. Pretty much straight away they approved us to make an exploratory game prototype and it worked out well."

However, before Neversoft was given the greenlight it was another studio that had originally pitched the idea of a skateboarding game to Activision. The format didn't quite click with the publisher but it liked the concept, so it turned to Neversoft – a studio that had recently helped them out of a bind by turning around the Bruce Willis-starring action game *Apocalypse* in nine months after its original developer dropped out – to make it happen.

"It was attractive to them because we were a team ready to go and we had a lot of skill in getting out a game quickly," says Mick. "They weren't thinking that *Tony Hawk* was going to be the huge seller that it was. They wanted to get a game out on the market by next Christmas and we were the team that could do that." ▶



» Tony Hawk has appeared in eight sequels since the 1999 original.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** NEVERSOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1999
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** EXTREME SPORTS

SKATER PROFILES

A closer look at the roster of characters



TONY HAWK

■ The world's most famous skateboarder retired his board in 1999 but continues to promote skating worldwide.



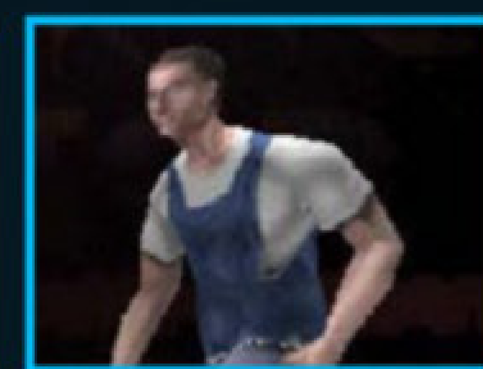
BOB BURNQUIST

■ Still an active pro skater, in 2010 Burnquist was the fifth person to pull off the infamous 900.



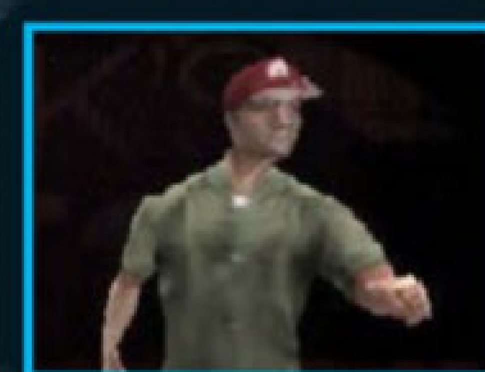
KAREEM CAMPBELL

■ Campbell has become one of the most successful skaters to come out of the US.



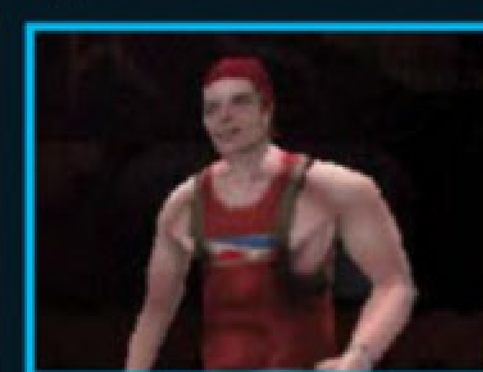
RUNE GLIFBERG

■ Hailing from Denmark, he remains an active skater and recently released a line of signature Converse shoes.



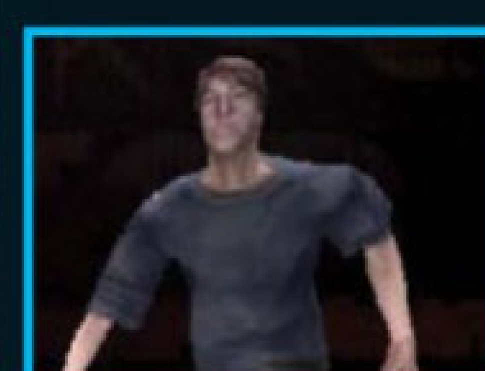
BUCKY LASEK

■ Alongside his professional skateboarding career, Lasek is also a professional rallycross driver.



CHAD MUSKA

■ One of the most influential skaters, Muska's recent achievements include opening an alternative clothing store.



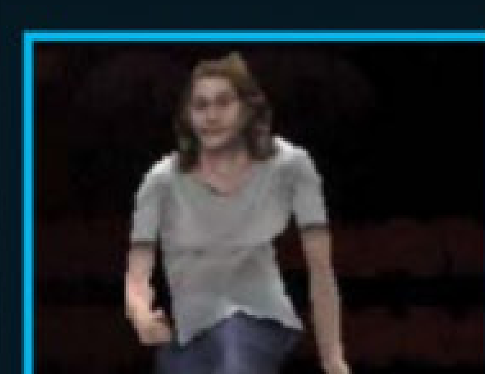
ANDREW REYNOLDS

■ As well as his board prowess, Reynolds is a successful entrepreneur.



GEOFF ROWLEY

■ Liverpool-born Geoff Rowley was given *Thrasher* magazine's coveted Skater Of The Year Award in 2000.



ELISSA STEAMER

■ The first professional female skater, Steamer was last awarded Bronze at the Summer X-Games 2009.



JAMIE THOMAS

■ Nicknamed 'The Chief' Jamie Thomas performed the infamous 'Leap Of Faith' down an 18-foot, 8-inch drop.



» [PlayStation] If you look closely in the Mall level you'll notice a reference to Neversoft's previous game, *Apocalypse*.



» [PlayStation] Mick recalls that there was some tension between the skaters in the game, particularly in later entries. According to him, some felt strongly that it should have either alternated between the featured skaters as headline acts or drop the Hawk name entirely.

"The mo-cap session was never actually used – it was more of a publicity thing"

Mick West

PLAYLIST

The tracklist of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

DEAD KENNEDYS
Police Truck

THE ERNIES
Here And Now

EVEN RUDE
Villified

GOLDFINGER
Superman

PRIMUS
Jerry Was A Race Car Driver

SPEEDEALER
Screamer/Nothing to Me

THE SUICIDE MACHINES
Cyco Vision

THE SUICIDE MACHINES
New Girl

UNSANE
Committed

THE VANDALS
Euro-Barge

There was one small problem, though. Neversoft had never made a skateboarding game before – it hadn't even made a sports game before. Where did the relatively unknown studio start when it came to creating one of the most popular gaming franchises of all time?

"The thing about Neversoft was there was a bowling alley opposite the offices," remembers Mick. "We'd go there for lunch sometimes and it had a *Top Skater* machine which was popular with members of the office and that influenced the original thinking."

Created by *Crazy Taxi* creator Kenji Kanno and released by Sega in 1997, *Top Skater* featured a skateboard controller that players stand on to guide skaters down a linear course, performing tricks to get a high score. "We enjoyed playing that game so we tried to make something similar to that," reveals Mick. "You'd go from the start to the end and when you got to the end you'd stop and get a score. It was like a racing game, really – you're basically trying to get around or along a track."

A part of this original thinking remains in the game: two of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*'s courses are downhill with a finish line at the end. However, the idea evolved after the team began studying real-life skaters.

"Things changed drastically when we tried to incorporate elements that we saw in the X-Games," recalls Mick. "People doing tricks in a half-pipe; you can't really get that half-pipe vibe on a downhill course – a half-pipe is going back and forth, over the same spots again and again. So the [original] idea ended up not being as much fun to play as we first thought and the whole game changed over time."

What became obvious was the necessity to enable players to concentrate on and express themselves through the tricks system. Neversoft poured over professional tapes, scrutinising the movements and style of top skaters, and began to integrate boardslides, nosebones and heelflips into the game (which was currently using the existing player model of Bruce Willis from *Apocalypse* as an avatar) understanding that authenticity would be needed to legitimise the concept. But it quickly became apparent that they would need a pro skater to help guide the rest of development.

By the time Tony Hawk signed on to headline the game, Neversoft had already been using the skater as a basis for some of the animations and moves featured in the game, helping to inform the direction of the title. However, with Hawk's star rising, confirmation of his involvement shined a spotlight on the game's development.

"Tony was wildly popular at the time because he got a lot of coverage for doing the 900 for the first time at the X-Games," remembers Mick. "It was an epic thing and he was instantly the most famous skateboarder around. His persona really was a huge part of the publicity for the game. You can see some of the other games suffered from that. Competing skating games were just 'Skating' or something like that and didn't have the same star power, so it certainly helped."



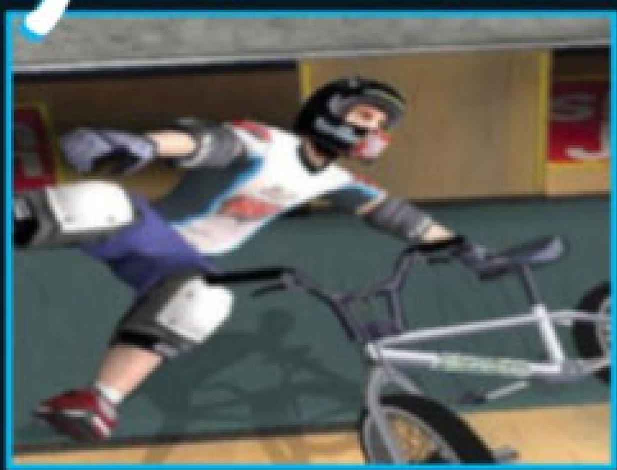
» [PlayStation] While most of the environments were complete inventions, Burnside was based on a real skatepark in Portland, Oregon.



» [PlayStation] Players could customise their character by choosing different boards, handling and wheel colour. It didn't make much difference to performance but added a touch of personality.

5 EXTREME SPORTS TITLES

We present a selection of other celebrity-endorsed extreme sports games



DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2000

Dave Mirra's inaugural videogame effort rides on the coattails of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* somewhat, using it as a template for its own trick-based BMX gameplay. It was nowhere near as impressive as its inspiration but put amazing ragdoll physics to good use to make its crashes all the more brutal.



SUNNY GARCIA SURFING 2001

Veteran surfer Sunny Garcia headlines this extreme sports sim that trades realism for wish-fulfilment. Instead of utilising real-world locations, *Sunny Garcia Surfing* invents its own island that boasts the largest waves in the world. Although, it's also teeming with sharks, jet skis and other hazardous objects to avoid.



MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2001

Hoping to strike gold twice, Activision's *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* is, as you can imagine, an adaptation of the publisher's own *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Using a modified version of the *Tony Hawk* engine, the carbon-copy gameplay involves passing a series of objectives in each stage to progress to the next level.



KELLY SLATER'S PRO SURFER 2002

Another entry in Activision's Pro series of extreme sports titles, *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer* involved stringing tricks together to achieve the highest possible score. Unfortunately, the concept was nowhere near as polished as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, with clunky animations and a noticeable lack of depth.



SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING 2008

While the original multiformat release garnered a lukewarm reception, it was the Wii version – titled *Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip* – that received the most favourable critical reception. Using the Wii Balance Board to cut through the slopes, White's first game was decent if not particularly remarkable.

Instantly Activision used Tony's involvement to make the wider media aware of the game's production. Journalists from around the world were invited to watch a mo-cap session, where Tony (dressed in a lycra suit covered in white balls) would perform a series of signature moves to be translated into the game. The event was a huge success, but as Mick remembers it wasn't particularly helpful to the continued development of the game. "The mo-cap session was never actually used," he states. "It was more of a publicity thing."

Activision was never under any false impression that the mo-cap data would prove useful to Neversoft. In fact, the studio warned the publisher that it was almost certain the data would be useless. "Activision was going to do it regardless for publicity," continues Mick. "Our animator couldn't really do anything with [the data] because it was not something that we were familiar with using and we had a lot of the animations coming along anyway. We ended up doing everything animate by hand using video reference."

Interestingly, Hawk wouldn't get involved in the design – he offered his thoughts on a few occasions when he visited the studio. When it came to replicating the style and movements of skaters, it was all down to the team figuring it out as they went along. Flip tricks off quarter-pipes, the satisfaction of holding a handstand off the lip, or just perfecting a grind along a handrail – this was new territory for the team and it all had to feel intuitive.

Having taken over player control halfway through development on the first game, Mick implemented the physics and control scheme that would be fundamental to the title's accessible nature. It was a major turning point in development. "In the first game [player control] was quite simple," he says. "You had a table mapping button presses to tricks. It got a lot more complicated in subsequent games. One of the key things about *Tony Hawk* is that it feels very nice to play. It's very responsive. You hold down the X button to crouch and you release to jump. It's very tight, you feel like you're controlling it. It's not like you're pressing it and something happens a tenth of a second later. That's one of the factors that contributed to the success of the game. It was fun to simply skate around and jump off things without really doing anything because it felt so responsive."

Mick ironed out a lot of the bugs – one particular problem involved skaters falling through the level – while adding features such as grinding on rails and wall riding. But it was becoming clear that if it truly wanted to push significant boundaries in the sports genre then the studio would need to look further afield for influence.

"*Super Mario 64* had been out for a while and the concept of open-world games was becoming popular," he continues. This was part of the drift away from the mould of *Top Skater* towards an open-world game. The first level in *Pro Skater*, Warehouse, was fairly basic in terms of level design; a box-like shape with ramps, half-pipes and destructible objects grafted to the scenery. While rudimentary by today's standards, even this fairly limited layout offered a ▶



» [PlayStation] Everyone knows the first game featured the unlockable character Officer Dick. But did you know there was another character, Private Carrera, which was only attainable through a cheat code?



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

APOCALYPSE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

SPIDER-MAN
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2000

GUN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2005



▶ rare sense of freedom for the player. "The original *Tony Hawk* starts with the Warehouse which is a small level, while the second is the School level, which is much more open," considers Mick. "In the first game we weren't using that much reference, so they weren't really based on real places as they were on later games. You sit down and think off the tip of your head 'what environments does a skater skate in?' An empty school is an obvious one, as is a city. We were thinking of areas off the top of our head and trying to think of the real-life things that would be in those levels. In a school, you can go down the railings of steps – that would be a real-life thing. You had to make it a lot more fun as well so you'd stick a lot of quarter-pipes everywhere and let people grind along the tops of walls or phone lines that aren't very real at all. You've got this mixture of reference to real things with other elements that make it more fun."

Pro Skater isn't a realistic game, and Neversoft prioritised fun over simulating skating to a precise degree. After leaping in the air 30 feet, grinding along phone lines and jumping from roof-to-roof, it's fair to assume that the studio wasn't aiming for realistic physics. This approach matched with the open layout of the level design impacted how progression would be defined within the game.

"Collecting the tapes is analogous to collecting the stars in *Mario*," says Mick, once again referencing the seminal Nintendo 64 title. "Each level had five things to do to complete that level and we just brainstormed them. We sat in front of a whiteboard and I drew a level and said 'what can we do?' and we would start throwing out ideas and writing them down."

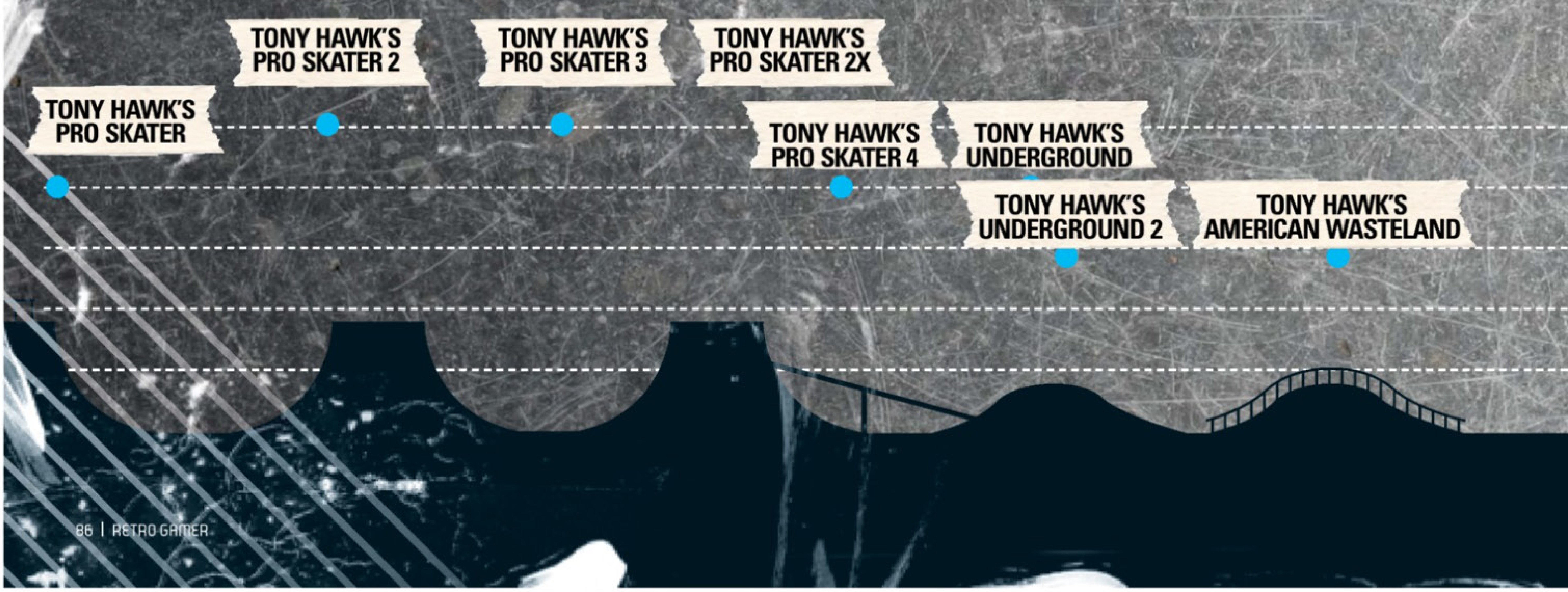




» [PlayStation] The game featured FMVs in the form of showreels of each of the featured characters' most impressive tricks.

> **"It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design"**
> Mick West

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE TONY HAWK FRANCHISE







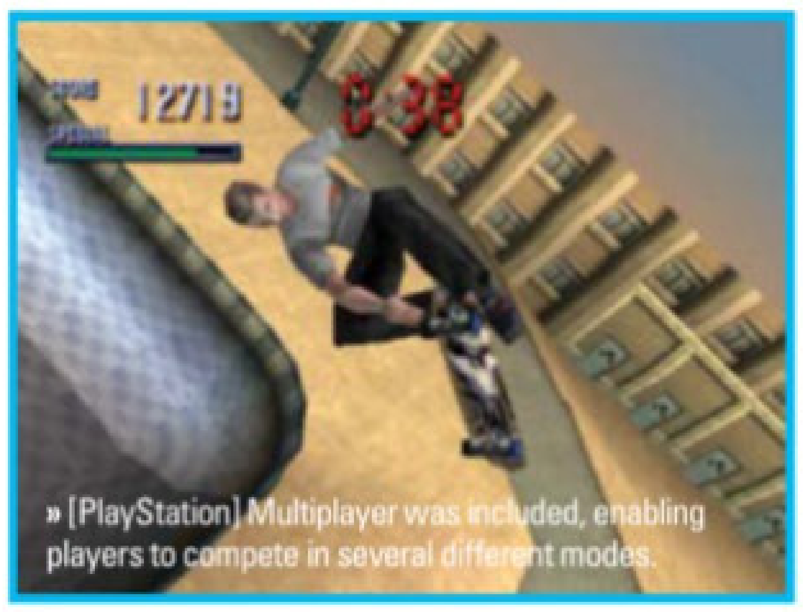
» [PlayStation] The main campaign is divided between objective-based courses and competition stages. The latter involves scoring a certain amount of points to gain medals.

» [PlayStation] Rather than hire external developers with experience working in the sports genre, Neversoft felt there was no game comparable and therefore it was the same team as *Apocalypse* that worked on the game.

There were some abandoned concepts, not to mention a few levels (one based along a pier, another on a freeway) that didn't make the cut. The process was collaborative, however Mick reiterates that the team always prioritised fun over gratuitous realism.

"People were always coming up with silly ideas that wouldn't work," he says. "People would say 'what if one of the wheels on your skateboard falls off and you have to skate around on three wheels leaning to one side to go back and get another wheel?' That would be no fun whatsoever. The fun factor is a big consideration in any game idea – people seem to miss that. They think realism is more important than fun. It's not really fun to fall over and break your leg in real life so we didn't simulate that."

Mick reflects on how the studio approached creating a brand new type of game. "The biggest challenge was learning how to do it. We didn't know what we were doing and therefore there was a lot more experimentation." The team had been familiar with the genres it had explored in previous titles. *Apocalypse* was a third-person shooter, which was also similar to a prototype the studio had worked on before getting



» [PlayStation] Multiplayer was included, enabling players to compete in several different modes.

the job. When it came to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, the studio had to think on its feet and adapt to the challenges it faced as it cut its teeth in the sports genre. "Skating was very new," says Mick. "It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design. The concepts were alien to people working on the game. It was a new type of game."

That sentiment was shared with consumers upon the game's release. Few games have ever penetrated the cultural zeitgeist quite like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* at the time. Before the *Jackass* generation had ever peeled their first Band-Aid, Neversoft had managed to encapsulate both the incipient prominence of extreme sports and the rebellious, carefree counter-culture of an emerging youth scene. Unsurprisingly, Mick cites the iconic soundtrack as integral to this: "The music was a big thing," he says. "It's not like it's authentic hardcore skating music of the time but it was novel to have a game that had such an interesting soundtrack of music playing in the background all the time. For a lot of skateboarders music is very important to them."

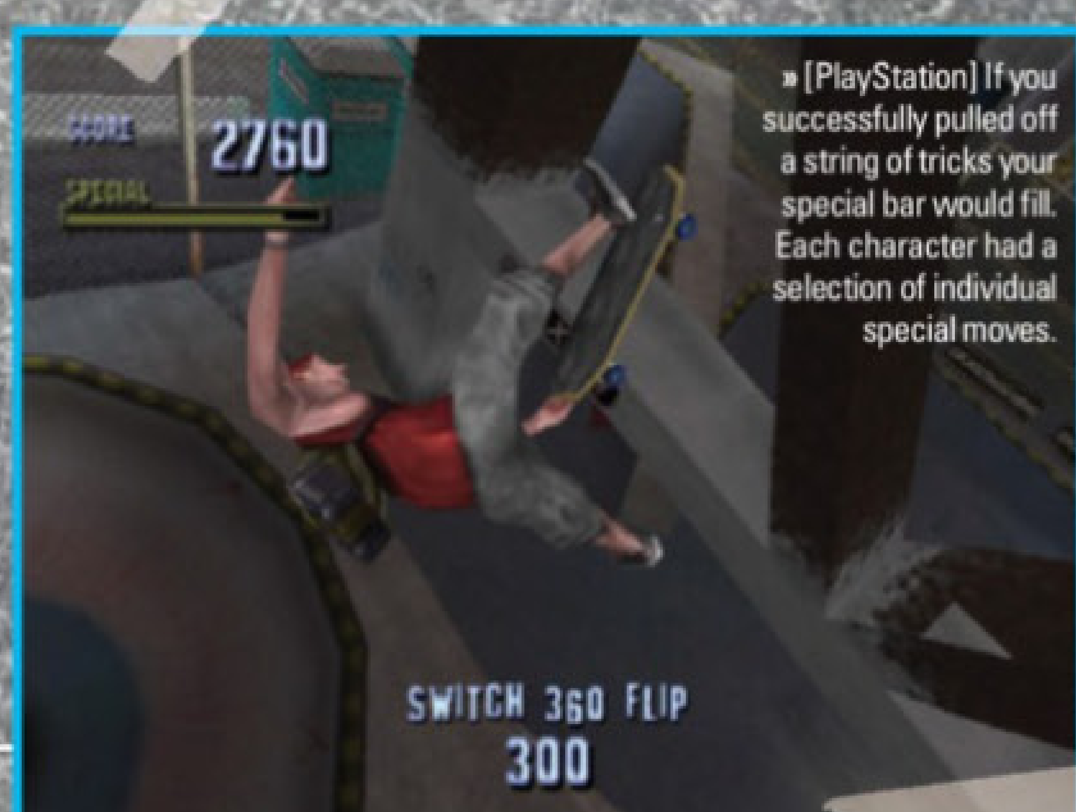
Mick had no idea how important the soundtrack would be to the game's legacy. Its initial implementation was a matter of convenience – the existing engine could support music tracks and video walls (the latter featured heavily across the levels). All that was left was for Activision to pick the tracks.

"It was also capturing skate culture with logos, stickers and using concepts like videoing the moves and collecting tapes, things like that," explains Mick. "They were all taking from skate culture. We tried to do as much things that directly reflected or referenced skating culture as possible."

But what Mick didn't expect was how it would contribute directly to the boom in skating's popularity. Ultimately, with the accessibility of the control scheme matched with a huge amount of depth made it was an essential gaming experience, but Hawk's endorsement gained it a far-reaching appeal. Even though there wasn't anything quite like it on the marketplace, Mick remembers his confidence in the game's success.

"My defining memory was just before the first game was released and I was going out to lunch with the chief executive of Activision at the time," he says. "He was talking about the game and he said something like 'I think this game is going to do fairly well' and I said 'I know it's going to do well. It's going to be a million-selling game.' He said 'we'll see'. And then of course it was. He didn't know what he had at the time and I felt strongly that it was going to be huge," concludes Mick. "I look back at the conversation with particular fondness." *





» [PlayStation] If you successfully pulled off a string of tricks your special bar would fill. Each character had a selection of individual special moves.



» [PlayStation] Each level has a set of objectives to complete. Some were as simple as scoring a set amount of points, others were more arbitrary.



Retro Inspired

New games that wish they were old



OLLiOLLi

In a brand new series, Darran Jones speaks to producer Simon Bennett about Roll7's fantastic score-attack game

■ DEVELOPER: ROLL7 ■ SYSTEM: PS VITA ■ GENRE: ARCADE

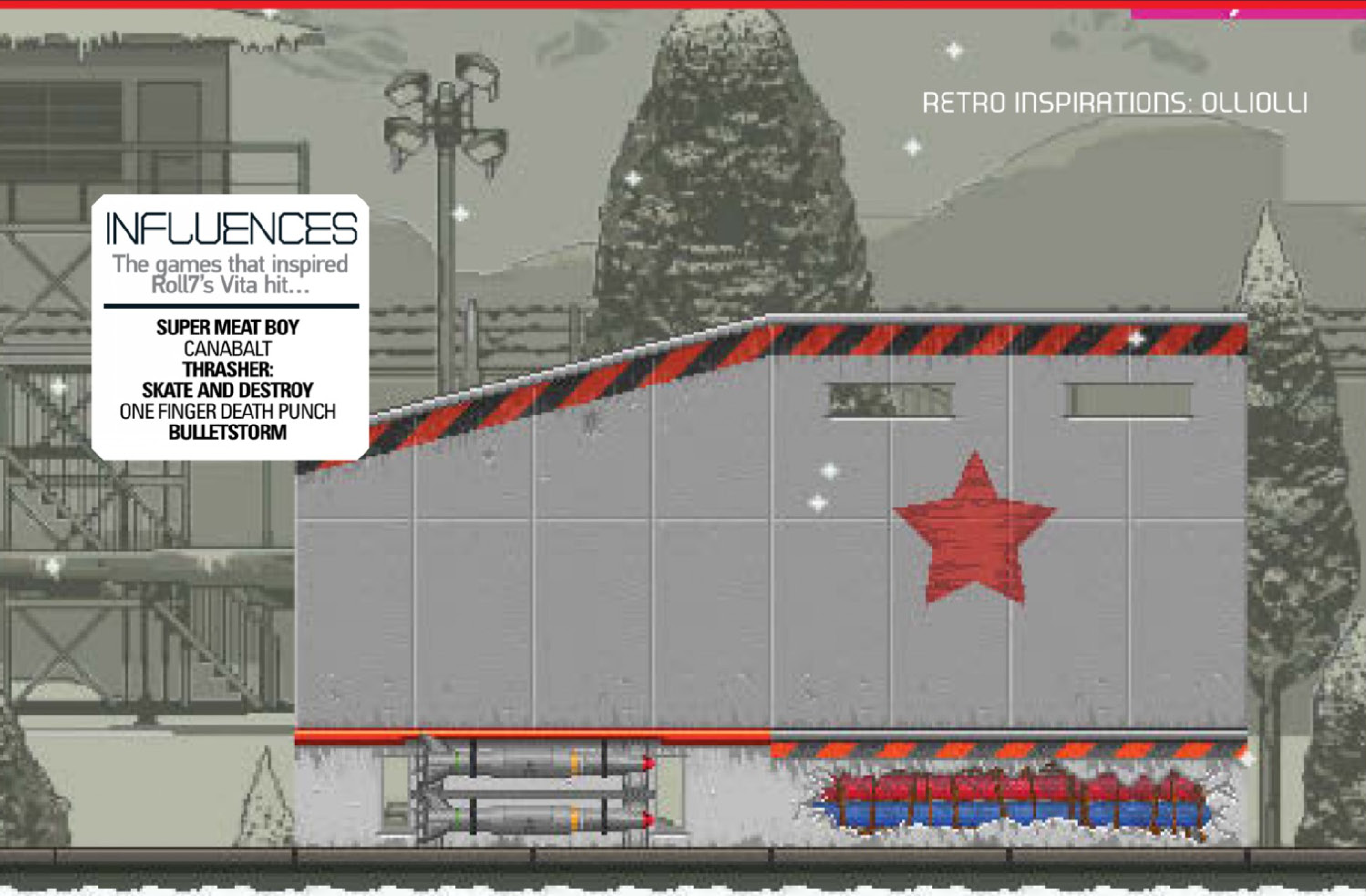
We fell in love with Roll7's game when we first played it earlier this year. How could you not fall hard for a score-attack game that's effectively a 2D version of the classic *Tony Hawk's* games? Released for the Vita back in January, Roll7 has now revealed that its trick-based game will be heading to PC, Mac, PS3 and PS4 later this year. Interestingly, a conversion for the format it was first designed for is currently nowhere to be seen.

"To be honest, it was all a matter of luck," begins Simon Bennett, as he prepares to jet off to E3. "We had built a prototype for iOS that we showed to Shahid [Ahmad] at Sony. He loved it so much that Sony funded it for Vita. We didn't know a massive amount about the Vita until that point! When we saw what it was capable of we really started to get excited about the control system. *OlliOlli* owes a lot of its feel to the Vita!"

And it's *OlliOlli*'s super slick control system that makes it so satisfying to play. Tricks and grinds are all pulled off via the left analogue stick, while spins are performed with the L and R buttons. Different directions create alternate moves, meaning experimentation is key in order to gain huge scores. Add in the need to stab the X button in order to successfully land each move and *OlliOlli* will delight anyone who fell in love with the *Tony Hawk's* games. They're presented very similarly too, with a variety of tasks on each level that range from earning specific scores and combos, to collecting items and pulling off specific tricks. It's surprising, then, that Roll7 distances itself from the classic PSone game, stating newer classics like *Super Meat Boy* and *Canabalt* as the inspiration behind its new game.

Regardless of its inspiration *OlliOlli* itself feels refreshingly new, partly due to its solid engine. The slickness of *OlliOlli*'s look and game mechanics did come at a cost… "The process of building *OlliOlli* was not easy and not without its horror stories. We decided to build our own engine – which was a troublesome and time-consuming task!" continues Simon. "We had never built for the Sony platform, which has its own frustrations with TRCs and a very tight FQA process. We had never poured so much love into a project, so when disagreements happened they were extremely heated and passionate!"

The hard work paid off though, with *OlliOlli* becoming a big success for Roll7. While the developer is currently at work on its next game, *Not A Hero*, it's also putting the final touches to *OlliOlli*'s big-screen debut. "It's pretty much a straight port, however DualShock 4 (and 3) really does feel amazing… There is something about having even further to flick the stick that adds more satisfaction to the game!" *



INFLUENCES

The games that inspired Roll7's Vita hit…

SUPER MEAT BOY
CANABALT
THRASHER: SKATE AND DESTROY
ONE FINGER DEATH PUNCH
BULLETSTORM

> **"We were bowled over by OlliOlli's success – we had pretty much written it off in our heads by the end of the project… We were in too deep!"**
>
> OlliOlli's popularity wasn't expected



» [PS Vita] The later levels have nightmarish gaps in them, making them hellish to navigate.



» [PS Vita] Grinding is an important aspect of *OlliOlli* and one of the key methods for building speed.

THE TEAM ON OLLIOLLI



DARRAN JONES

■ It's a really tough little game, but never infuriatingly so, which is the perfect hook for me personally. A brilliant score attack game that gives my thumbs a really good workout.



NICK THORPE

■ *OlliOlli* really appeals to my inner perfectionist. I approach each stage looking to clear it with a full combo, and that's always just out of reach – it's difficult but definitely possible.



STEVE HOLMES

■ "Having spent ages playing it a worrying amount, *OlliOlli* just felt like an extension of my arms – the gameplay is *that* responsive. Give these guys the *Tony Hawk's* games and be done with it."



JONATHAN WELLS

■ Personally… I'm not a fan, I think the visuals are great, but as far as gameplay and the overall feel of the game, it's something I can't ever see myself putting as many hours in as the rest of the team have.

THE TEAM

The key people behind OlliOlli

JOHN RIBBINS
GAME DESIGNER

SIMON BENNETT
PRODUCER

THOMAS HEGARTY
MARKETING / PRODUCTION

NIKOS ASFIS
LEAD PROGRAMMER

PETROS MIZAMIDIS
PROGRAMMER

WILLEM VAN DER MERWE
JUNIOR PROGRAMMER

HARRY EVANS
ARTIST

GUY COCKCROFT
SOUND

In the chair with...

MEV DINC

Starting his career with porting 3D Ant Attack to the C64, then creating the cult Spectrum budget title Gerry The Germ, Mev Dinc worked on some of the most ambitious game releases of his time. Mike Bevan talks to the driving force behind First and Second Samurai, and many others

When Mevlut Dinc first arrived in England from his native Turkey in 1979, the last thing on his mind was a career in computer games. Growing up in a remote village 40 miles from the port of Ordu on the Black Sea, Mev graduated from Ankara University with a degree in economics. The late Seventies had been a troubled time for his country, with political uprisings and student unrest, and Mev was rather relieved to find himself in his new adopted homeland. He would end up staying for two decades, making a name for himself first as a highly accomplished Spectrum programmer, then as managing director of Vivid Image, the all-star development studio he set up with *Last Ninja* programmer John Twiddy and graphics artist Hugh Riley. Over 30 years on, he's back in his homeland, tirelessly championing a new frontier of games design and production in Istanbul. As Mev himself admits, "It wasn't at all planned, so it's a fascinating story…"

» [ZX Spectrum] *Gerry The Germ's* loading screen.



So how is it that you suddenly found yourself in the UK?
I was studying at my university in Turkey and by complete accident or fate, I ended up getting married to a lovely English girl, so that's how I ended up in England. I was still at university so was having to go back and forth between England and Turkey to finish off the course. After university I had hoped to do some sort of higher education in England, but I found myself working in a cable factory in Southampton.

And how did you end up getting your first computer back then?
A close colleague of mine from the factory had a ZX81, and had been trying to tell me all about these games he was playing and how wonderful it was, but at the time I had no interest in games or computers whatsoever. Then in 1982 the ZX Spectrum came out, and he convinced me to put my name down for one. I had to wait about three months… And when our names came up my friend actually decided to drive to the Sinclair factory to pick up our Spectrums! That's how excited he was, and I just went along with him. So that's how I bought my first Spectrum… 16K!

Were you hooked right away with your purchase?
To be honest, I brought it home and left it in a corner because I still didn't have any interest in games at all. Eventually I opened up my box and saw this little black thing and realised that on its own it didn't do anything… I needed a bloody TV and a cassette deck, so I left it alone for a couple of weeks more. Eventually I set it all up, and started reading the rather big instruction book that came with it, which was all about BASIC programming on the Spectrum. But I couldn't understand most of it… my English wasn't too bad but it was nowhere near good enough to completely learn a new language. I'd only been in England for about four years working in a factory, so you can imagine the scope of my vocabulary!

So what was it that eventually convinced you to start coding?
I started buying some computer magazines… at the time the most important and influential for me was a weekly magazine called *Popular Computing Weekly*. It was good for the end user because there were articles about games themselves, but more importantly there were really decent articles on programming and game design. I started concentrating on understanding computing and programming which fascinated me even more. And in PCW someone had written a small article about programming that was very influential on my career. He said to become a good games programmer you had to forget about BASIC because it was too slow, and it was best to learn machine code.

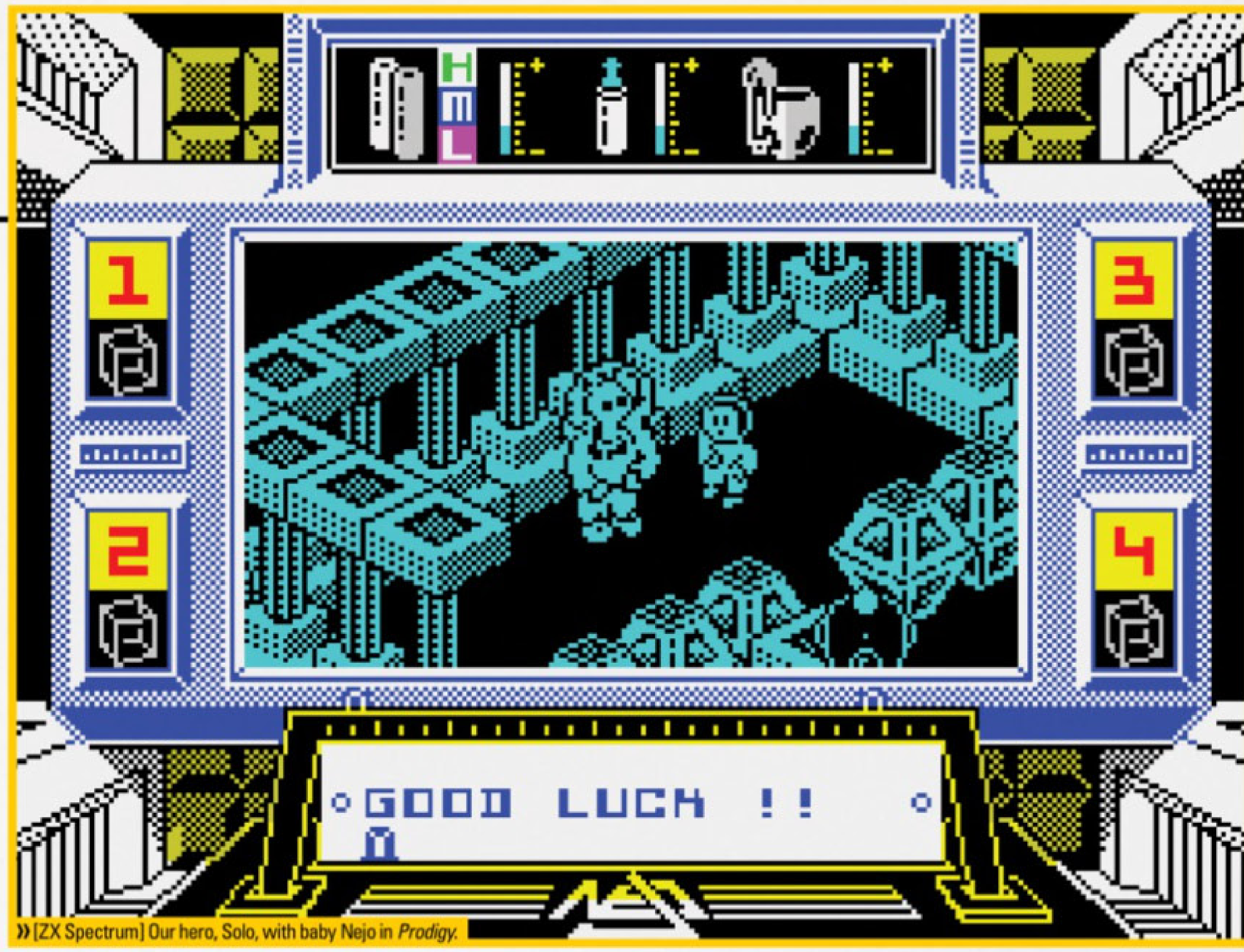
How long did it take you to become proficient?
About two years… I ended up self-teaching from magazines and books. I started writing demos and trying things out… there is a board game called *Nine Men's Morris*, which is a very traditional board game in Turkey, which I was very good at and actually grew up playing in my home village. So I thought maybe I could program this so that was my first project. And I realised that I had a knack for design and presentation.

Had you become more interested in other computer games by this point?
I started breaking into them and trying to understand how they worked, which was very crucial for my learning to program the Spectrum in particular. One of the games that was very influential for me was *Arcadia* by Imagine. I thought it was fantastic… it was beautifully designed and I was gob-smacked by all the different attack sequences. But because I was so bad at playing games I just couldn't get very far in it… I wanted to get further so I could see the rest of the fancy sequences but my ship kept blowing up!

So it was around that time that you decided to take the plunge into a career as a videogame programmer then?
Yes, I decided to leave the factory to go into game programming professionally, so it was a huge risk. Then I saw an ad in my local paper from a C64 programmer [Paul Fik] looking for a Spectrum programmer and I thought 'wow this guy's obviously looking for me' because I didn't think there would be any other Spectrum programmers in Southampton! I responded to the ad and he told me he had been asked to convert *3D Ant Attack* for the C64. I was really impressed with *3D Ant Attack* on the Spectrum; it was one of the first 3D games ever. It was a great experience for me, helping on the game and getting to find out a little about the C64 too – all the pros and cons of the



> "My friend actually decided to drive to the Sinclair factory to pick up our Spectrums! That's how excited he was"
>
> Mev on being persuaded to get a Spectrum



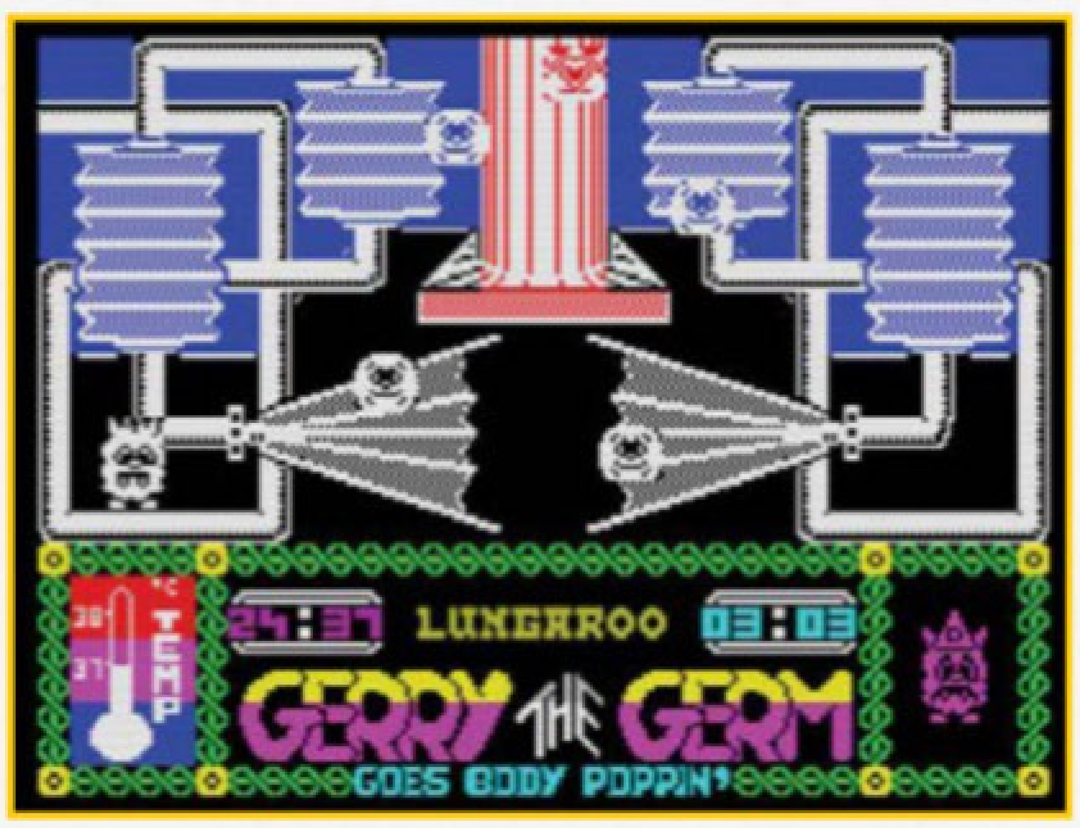
» [ZX Spectrum] Our hero, Solo, with baby Nejo in *Prodigy*.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **3D ANT ATTACK*** [C64] 1984
- **GERRY THE GERM GOES BODY POPPIN'** [ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD] 1985
- **PRODIGY** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1986
- **ENDURO RACER** [AMSTRAD] 1986
- **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA** [ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD] 1986
- **ALIENS** [C64] 1986
- **KNIGHTMARE** [ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD] 1987
- **LAST NINJA 2** [VARIOUS] 1987
- **LAST NINJA 3*** [C64] 1987
- **HAMMERFIST** [VARIOUS] 1990
- **TIME MACHINE** [VARIOUS] 1990
- **FIRST SAMURAI** [VARIOUS] 1991
- **SECOND SAMURAI** [AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE] 1993
- **STREET RACER** [VARIOUS] 1994
- **SCARS** [VARIOUS] 1998
- **DUAL BLADES** [GBA] 2002
- **ISTANBUL MMORPG** [PC] 2007
- **I CAN FOOTBALL** [PC] 2009
- **SÜPERCAN** [PC] 2011
- **SÜPERCAN 2** [PC] 2013

***ASSISTED**



» [ZX Spectrum] Mev's first game, *Gerry The Germ*, was released on British Telecom's budget Firebird label.


» Box-art for *Prodigy*.



» [ZX Spectrum] Title screen for *Prodigy*, Mev's first game for Electric Dreams.

two different machines, which helped later on in my career when I started doing stuff on the 64 too. And then I did my first game – *Gerry The Germ*!

How did the idea for *Gerry*… er… germinate?
I think from day one I realised that I was technically very good, and I also realised I could be 'different' in terms of coming up with ideas. And seeing as most heroes are nice people I thought, why not make my player character a 'baddie'? I thought the idea of playing a germ, entering and destroying a human body, was quite fascinating. It was also very risky, but I thought it would get people's attention at least. I took the game to Mirrorsoft but they said: 'you must be joking, we couldn't publish this! We're Mirror group, a respected group of companies!' They literally threw me out of the room! At a computer fair I'd met Tony Rainbird, the managing director of Firebird, which was the publishing arm of British Telecom. At the time I thought BT was even more respectable than Mirror Group, they won't accept this. But Tony was fascinated by the idea and said he'd love to publish it. And he was impressed with my coding ability so he gave me my first break.

> I always wanted to set up my own company. John and Hugh both jumped at the chance which was fantastic
>
> Mev on the birth of Vivid Image

Despite it being published as a budget game, you still joke that your bank manager was very happy about it…
I did the Spectrum and Amstrad versions myself. I was surprised how easy the game was to translate to the Amstrad because the machines were so similar. Tony said that I could do the Commodore version too. In Southampton I met this amazing programmer, Edwin Rayner, who became my C64 programmer, and he did the Commodore version of Gerry. So we ended up with three versions of my first game. I did receive quite a lot of royalties, particularly from the US version. To this day I don't know why, but the C64 disk version of *Gerry The Germ* has some kind of cult following in the USA of all places. [laughs] I thought the Americans would be even more conservative than the Brits! And Rob Hubbard probably did one of his best works for my game… in fact he did say as much in some interviews himself.

And your next game was your isometric adventure, *Prodigy*… quite a step up from *Gerry*!
Actually Tony and British Telecom wanted me to do my second game with them too. I'd also met Rod Cousens through my work on *3D Ant Attack*, and Jon Dean, who at the time was setting up a software studio at Activision called Electric Dreams. I met with Jon and he was very impressed with my attitude and he said 'Look, please do the next game with us.' They gave me a very good offer, and because they were based in Southampton it made more sense that I worked with them. Of course Tony was disappointed, but he was very understanding.

And technically that game was remarkable for its time…
Yes, It was a very ambitious game, and very difficult to write. But those two early games, *Prodigy* and *Gerry*, helped me so much for my future projects. *Prodigy* was a landmark game, the first scrolling isometric game on the Spectrum. It did some really clever stuff – dynamic scrolling mazes with a very fast game engine – I was updating the whole game world all the time which was a very hard thing to do on the Spectrum. When you play the game you don't realise all that's happening in the background, and that game taught me a lot about not wasting resources unnecessarily.

In *Prodigy* you had a little baby to look after, change his nappy, feed and water. Another very unusual Mev Dinc concept…
Exactly, it was a very original idea for 1986! And he'd follow you wherever you went, even through the mazes. And there were all these horrible baddies



FIVE TO PLAY

Get an insight into Mev's game design mind with these great games



PRODIGY

■ Despite being only Mev's second commercial Spectrum game, *Prodigy* is a remarkable feat of programming. It was the first to offer a multi-directional scrolling isometric environment, albeit in a small window to keep the action at its brisk pace. The game mixed shooting, exploration and baby-wrangling, with an extra-terrestrial hero trying to escape an experimental lab with a toddler called Nejo in tow. On the way you'll need to keep him fed while watching out for nappy rash (we kid you not). Its only misstep is its extreme difficulty, with the game returning you to the start when you get clobbered by baddies.



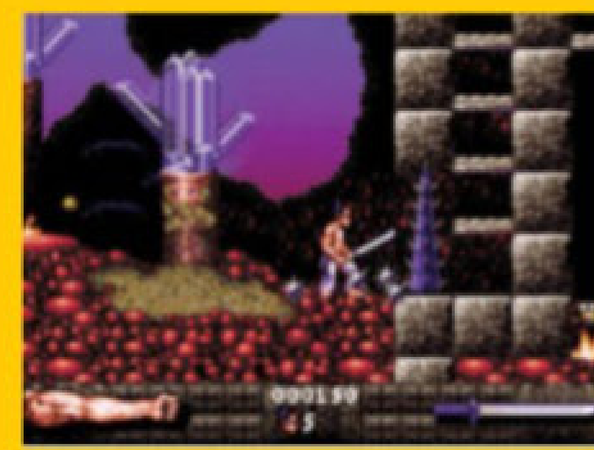
HAMMERFIST

■ Vivid Image's debut release was an ambitious attempt at a coin-op style arcade-adventure, packed with intricately detailed graphics and striking animation. Featuring a pair of holographic protagonists, the hulk-like Hammerfist and the athletic Metalisis, each with their own unique abilities, its notable for a clever control system allowing players to switch characters, shoot, punch, kick and somersault with a single one-button joystick. The game's objective was to escape from a futuristic undersea complex, solving simple puzzles and leaving a trail of destruction while opening the exit to each flick-screen location.



TIME MACHINE

■ *Time Machine* put you in the shoes of Professor Potts, a recluse with an obsession for traveling in time and space, who in no way reminds us of a certain BBC sci-fi hero… After getting stuck in prehistoric times, he decides to alter the course of evolution, like you do. Played over a series of interlinked 'time zones' the game has plenty of interesting ideas, for instance, planting seeds in an earlier time zone results in a forest springing up when you travel to a later time period. On the way you'll discover fire, re-invent the wheel, and hitch rides on pterodactyls, which certainly makes a change from blasting aliens.



FIRST SAMURAI

■ Despite being 'inspired' by System 3's *Last Ninja* series, *First Samurai* and its sequel *Second Samurai* were far superior games. More similar to scrolling platformers like *Turrican*, they were a splendid mix of martial arts fisticuffs, sword-based combat and puzzle solving, packed with secrets and huge enemies. *First Samurai* sported particularly memorable sound work, like our hero's exclamation 'MY SWORD!' and the snippets from Handel's *Messiah*. *Second Samurai* was arguably even better, adding two-player simultaneous play, bigger levels and absolutely loads of bosses to dice with your katana.

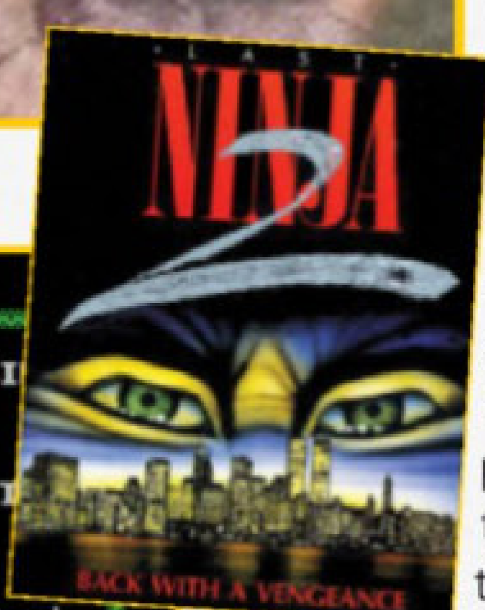


STREET RACER

■ With its cheeky title-screen homage to Capcom's *Street Fighter*, it was obvious that Vivid Image's racer intended to mix the spirit of classic fighting games with the speedy thrills of *Mario Kart*, with a little bit of *Wacky Races* thrown in. With a roster of exotic characters each with their own unique special moves, the SNES version bettered *Mario Kart* by supporting up to four players. In fact Nintendo was so impressed that it rushed to take notes when the game was first unveiled. There's also a rather hilarious bonus soccer mini-game, which makes an enjoyable diversion from bombing around the track.



» Mev circa *Last Ninja 2* with John Twiddy, Hugh Riley, plus mysterious interloper…





» [ZX Spectrum] *Last Ninja 2*… Ninjas? In New York?!

coming after you all the time, they were very clever… and it was too hard. When you died you went right to the beginning so it was very frustrating. So that was a mistake, but the game world was so small, and I couldn't do save game features or things like that at the time. Those were luxury things that came later.

And then you ended up coding the Amstrad port of *Enduro Racer*…

I wasn't really very keen on doing that to begin with as I wasn't interested in conversions. But Rod and Jon really insisted because for whatever reason the original Spectrum programmers didn't want to do it. The Spectrum version was an amazing feat of programming – one of the first very impressive arcade coin-op conversions. And they offered me really good money… So I decided to take it on the condition that I could meet the programmers and get some help from them. And I met the guys and they were telling me how they did the roads and track… they used some amazing techniques, far more advanced than me. And I was nodding my head, but I couldn't understand a thing! So I said I really need the source code to finish this quickly. Luckily they said no problem. I ended up simulating the entire Spectrum code on the Amstrad, just adding a little bit of colour… not much. [laughs]

You were also involved in a couple of movie tie-ins, *Big Trouble In Little China* and *Aliens*. One being rather better than the other we might say.

Well I've been trying to forget about *Big Trouble In Little China*! I got lumbered with that stupid project because some developer up north failed to finish the game on time, and they took a lot of money from Electric Dreams and never finished. They literally asked me to rescue the project. I wasn't involved with the design at all, I just coded, and I had so little time, two months for both the Spectrum and Amstrad versions. But *Aliens* was a fabulous game, I was involved with helping with the design of the original C64 version, and my programmer, Edwin Rayner, provided a lot of the sprite routines. I remember it was the Christmas rush and we all stayed at the Electric Dreams offices for weeks on end… many late nights, horrible burgers and pizzas! I remember Nick Pelling, who was working on *Fire Track* on the C64, falling ►





"Raff came in one day and played the 'Hallelujah' sample and I said 'That's staying in!'"

Mev on the origins of First Samurai's famous sound effect

asleep at his computer and waking up with the imprint of the keyboard on his face! Amazing times…

We mustn't forget your cult television show tie-in *Knightmare*…

I was only involved in that because of Jon Dean, we had such a great relationship. Jon said there's this amazing new kids TV show that's going to be huge, I want you to do the programming for the computer game version. The game was mostly based on the *Knightmare* TV show and it was designed by Jon, although I did help him a little bit. I mostly did all the coding, and again it was a fantastic game, although it was very simple and didn't have a lot of depth. It was such a fascinating and original premise for a TV show, but as a computer game it wasn't really as unique. But it was an interesting arcade adventure game with a lot of quizzes and questions, and I thought I did a good job squeezing them all into the little bit of memory that the Spectrum had.

Then you left Electric Dreams to work on the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of System 3's *Last Ninja 2* didn't you?

Yes… they couldn't do the first one… they couldn't convert it from the C64 to the Spectrum. Activision was the publisher and that's why Rod got me involved. I told Mark Cale, the owner of System 3, that I didn't want to take another developer's code and try and make it better… why not forget about [the first] *Last Ninja* on the Spectrum. I suggested he put out an ad in the magazines saying that he wasn't pleased with the Spectrum version of the original *Last Ninja*, that it wasn't up to his standards, and that he was canceling it. I told him I thought he'd get a lot of respect if he did that. And also in the same ad that he was getting the Spectrum and Amstrad version of *Last Ninja 2* done from day one, alongside the C64 version, and that if he liked he could say I was doing it. So that's what he did. I met John Twiddy, the programmer of the C64 version, and Hugh Riley, who to me was the best ever 8-bit artist, and we did *Last Ninja 2* together from scratch. We all chipped into the design and came up with a lot of interesting ideas and the three of us did the whole game together.

And then the three of you formed Vivid Image…

Yes… from day one I always wanted to do my own games, and I always wanted to set up my own company. John and Hugh both jumped at the chance, which was fantastic.

Was there a lot of expectation and pressure on you to deliver with the first couple of Vivid Image titles, *Hammerfist* and *Time Machine*?

Well, because *Hammerfist* was our first game, and we were the guys behind *Enduro Racer* and *Last Ninja 2*, we maybe overreacted to it. We literally tried to create a proper coin-op style game on a computer but it was ridiculously ambitious. We spent a lot of time working on the control system, having two characters that could change into each other instantly. It did receive great reviews but I personally wasn't as pleased with it as I would have liked. And with *Time Machine* you could travel between different time zones instantly, but this made the game very small. Although it was very ambitious, when you played it there wasn't enough depth to it. Although, many people voted it the most original game that year, and it had great graphics.

And you were involved in producing a version of *Hammerfist* for the ill-fated Konix Multi-system weren't you?

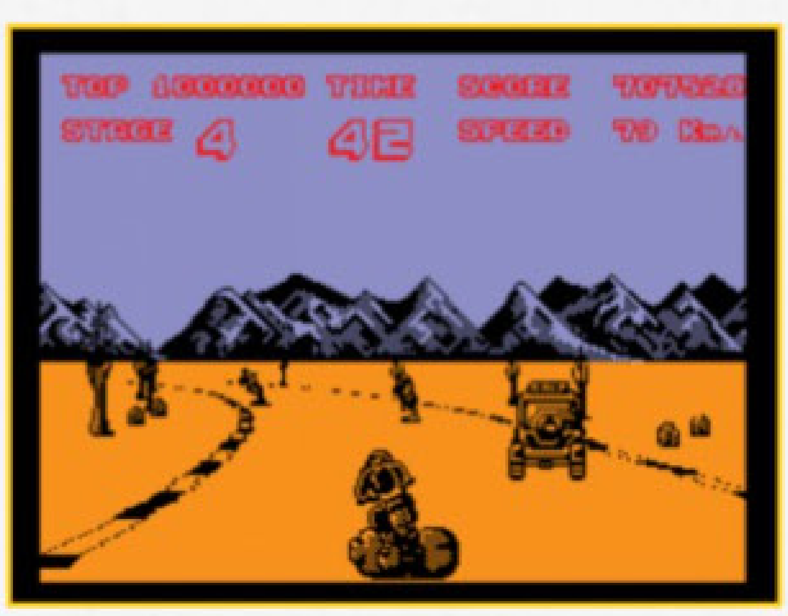
That was a great system that unfortunately failed… it would have been Europe's console. Jon Dean was involved heavily in running the whole thing, and I actually did the Konix version of *Hammerfist* myself. I finished the game, and was gob-smacked when I realised the thing wasn't coming out, because it was the best version. It was a great machine.

Were you pleased with how well *First Samurai* turned out?

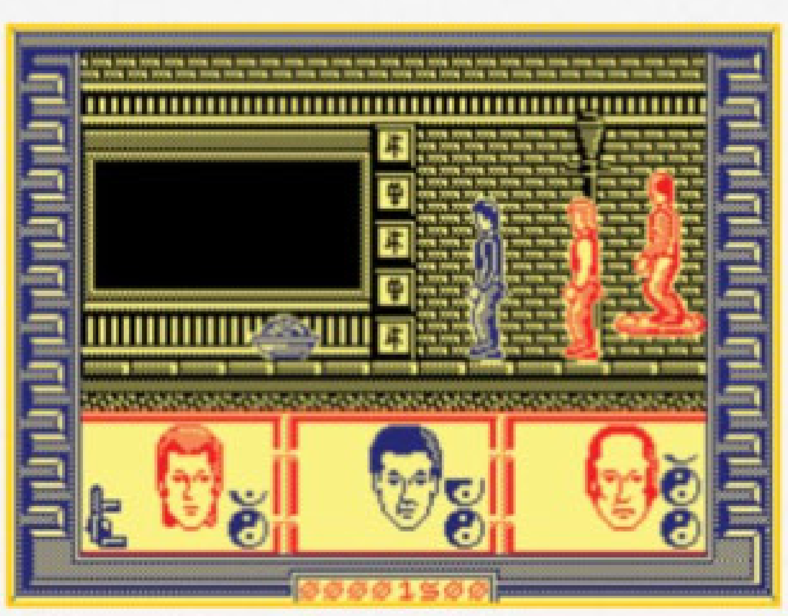
I think with *First Samurai* we finally hit the level we wanted to achieve with Vivid Image, a proper arcade-style game. All the versions were amazing, from the Amiga to the C64. We worked with wonderful people, like Raff Cecco who did the Amiga version, and Jon Williams who coded on the C64. We wanted to do another combat/fighting game, but we obviously didn't want to use another 'ninja' character, it had to be something else, like a samurai. So I thought well… after *Last Ninja*, *First Samurai* would be a fantastic name for the game. It was more of a parody than anything, but then all the magazines at the time were asking whether it was a dig at System 3! Raff was a great coder… He created a lot of sound samples himself to test the game and he came in one day and played the 'Hallelujah' sample and I said 'That's staying in!' He said 'No I just did that for a test'. I said 'But it sounds amazing!' And in hindsight I don't think we could have done a better sound effect. 'OH NO, MY SWORD!' is actually Raff's voice. I got him to record it because I didn't want to get an actor to do it. And the title music has to be my favourite of all the games we worked on… it was written by a 16-year-old called Michael Davis… I had a good relationship with the mags at the time – we did a lot of work in progress features for *First Samurai*. I got a lot of requests from readers to do the title music for the game, and I received this demo. I thought it was fantastic – it goes so well with the intro for the game. I think it's one of the best pieces of Amiga music ever.

And for the sequel you added a hilarious two-player mode…

I loved *Second Samurai*… and obviously playing with the name, I thought we should do a second samurai on



» [Amstrad] *Enduro Racer* was a massive seller in France, where Mev won a 'best programmer' award.



» [Amstrad] Although he admits he'd rather forget about *Big Trouble In Little China*…



» [Mega Drive] The re-written Mega Drive version of *Second Samurai* received a limited release only in Europe.



» [SNES] A friendly kickabout in *Street Racer*.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS



Burning questions from members of our forum

MERMAN: Did the idea for *Prodigy* come from your previous work on *3D Ant Attack*?

I think it was more the isometric Ultimate games [such as *Knight Lore*]. So much was happening in the industry, even though it was the early days… there was so much talent, everyone was trying new things, and we were all influencing one another.

HIRO: Why was flick-screen instead of scrolling chosen for *Time Machine* and *Hammerfist* – was it purely a personal design choice or was it also bound to certain hardware limitations?

Actually I didn't want to… we had to compromise. On those games we wanted to do something that looked and played like a coin-op on a computer. In *Hammerfist* there was so much going on on-screen, loads of background animation, tentacles moving about, lights going up and down… we were really pushing the hardware to its limits. But because everything was crammed into a static screen I don't think people could really appreciate how much was going on, because at the end of the day the player is only really interested in what is going on with his character and the enemies. So maybe it was too ambitious in that respect. We maybe should have kept the game a bit simpler, and done a less complicated scrolling arcade-style game… it might have been more successful.

RORY MILNE: Was a sequel to *Hammerfist* ever considered?

No, because the first game didn't really make the impact I'd been hoping for unfortunately.

DRS: On the C64 *Ant Attack* conversion, did you spend a long time worrying if you could accurately recreate the boob wobble and skirt uplift from the Speccy original? It's those little details that matter…

[Laughs] It was really just a direct port from the Spectrum. I didn't meet Sandy White until after the conversion, although I did ask for the source code to assist the C64 programmer. Like *Enduro Racer* most of the stuff in there I probably didn't really understand!



» [PC] MMORPG *Istanbul*, from Mev's Turkish studio Sobee, accurately models the city in which it is set.



» [N64] For *SCARS* Mev came up with the idea of basing all the cars on different animals.

the screen too. I did a lot of sound work on the game myself using a program called ProTracker, which was a very famous sound creation utility. I did a lot with the sound driver so we could have fantastic background music and multiple sound effects at the same time using four channels. The end result was obvious because there was so much going on.

Your SNES title *Street Racer* was equally cutting-edge…

We wanted to improve on *Mario Kart* technically… I discovered that *Mario Kart* used a DSP [maths] chip on the cartridge which made it more powerful, but it was still running at 30 frames per second. We decided not to use the DSP chip because it added three dollars to the cost of each cart. So I said that I wanted four players, and that our game should run at 60 frames-per-second, which was unheard of at the time. Even PlayStation games didn't run at 60 frames per second, at least not for a long time. Of course it was also a bit of a play on *Street Fighter*, we had people racing and fighting. That was one of the major themes behind the name. I even asked the guys to make the logo a little bit like *Street Fighter*…

We're surprised you got away with that!

Well the game had nothing to do with *Street Fighter* really – I suppose they thought it was a compliment. And the game was good. If it had been crap I'm sure they would have complained! [laughs]

The character design in *Street Racer* was splendid. We liked the German dude whose car turned into a Fokker triplane…

Ah Helmut! And I also put in a Turkish guy with a flying carpet… Hodja. I received a number of hand-written letters about the game, and one was from a nine-year-old kid saying that he loved that character and thought the game was better than *Mario Kart*, which was a lovely compliment!

And *Hodja* became the title for another Vivid Image game that never saw the light of day. A game the Rowland brothers (of *Mayhem In Monsterland* fame) were working on?

Well Hodja was one of the most important characters in *Street Racer* and I thought, well I come from Turkey and Hodja is a Turkish character, and kids seemed to like him, so why not give him a game of his own? We were going to do a huge game on PlayStation, with the Rowlands, Raff Cecco, and many others. It was going to be the first 3D arcade adventure, well before *Super Mario* on the N64. But it fell apart… I had some bad experiences, fell out with a few of my people, and I had to cancel the project.

Why did you decide to return to Turkey in 2000?

We did another racing game called *SCARS*. But we had drastic problems. Ubisoft did the graphics in France, but unfortunately the tracks were too short and too difficult, and it ruined the game. I felt I'd reached the pinnacle of my career in the UK, and I wanted to start a games sector in Turkey which would make me feel proud again. I had to really start from scratch… I took on a few enthusiastic university students, and I really enjoyed the challenge. And considering the lack of resources here we've done some amazing things. There's a very big games sector in Turkey now with 25 million players; mobile gaming has become really big here. I set up the world's first digital games federation which I'm very proud of. We did a game called *Istanbul*, Turkey's first MMORPG. Living in an amazing city like Istanbul I wanted to include a lot of local content and culture. We also did *I Can Football*, the world's first 11 versus 11 soccer game, and more recently we launched the *Süpercan* games, based on Turkey's first digital kids' hero. In five weeks we reached over 5 million players.

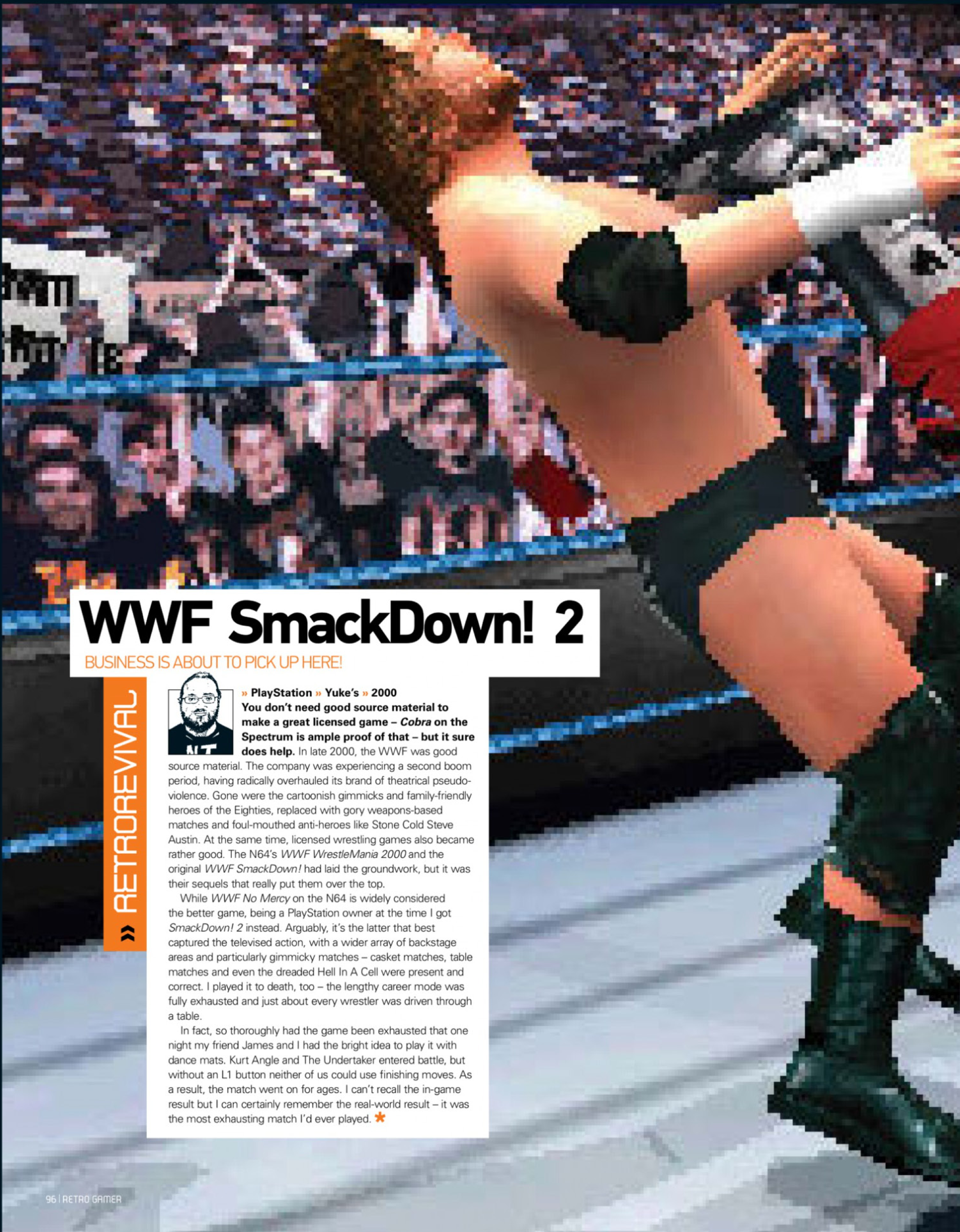
How has the games industry changed over the years you've been involved? And what does the future hold for Mev Dinc?

Of course I'm one of the lucky people that witnessed the growth of the games industry from day one. There aren't many people that started back in 1983 and are still in the game… even Raff Cecco! But today there are still some great opportunities… I'm advocating and encouraging all the young people here to get into mobile gaming. My next big project is setting up a digital games incubation and innovation centre where I can help enthusiastic and talented young people become mobile developers. Because with mobile gaming we are going back to the spirit of the early Eighties, with just one or two guys getting together and doing amazing things.

You can view Mev's current and recent projects at www.sobee.com.tr



» Mev's latest project is a series of games based on a new Turkish digital hero for children, Süpercan.



WWF SmackDown! 2

BUSINESS IS ABOUT TO PICK UP HERE!

» RETROREVIVAL

» PlayStation » Yuke's » 2000

You don't need good source material to make a great licensed game – *Cobra* on the Spectrum is ample proof of that – but it sure does help. In late 2000, the WWF was good source material. The company was experiencing a second boom period, having radically overhauled its brand of theatrical pseudo-violence. Gone were the cartoonish gimmicks and family-friendly heroes of the Eighties, replaced with gory weapons-based matches and foul-mouthed anti-heroes like Stone Cold Steve Austin. At the same time, licensed wrestling games also became rather good. The N64's *WWF WrestleMania 2000* and the original *WWF SmackDown!* had laid the groundwork, but it was their sequels that really put them over the top.

While *WWF No Mercy* on the N64 is widely considered the better game, being a PlayStation owner at the time I got *SmackDown! 2* instead. Arguably, it's the latter that best captured the televised action, with a wider array of backstage areas and particularly gimmicky matches – casket matches, table matches and even the dreaded Hell In A Cell were present and correct. I played it to death, too – the lengthy career mode was fully exhausted and just about every wrestler was driven through a table.

In fact, so thoroughly had the game been exhausted that one night my friend James and I had the bright idea to play it with dance mats. Kurt Angle and The Undertaker entered battle, but without an L1 button neither of us could use finishing moves. As a result, the match went on for ages. I can't recall the in-game result but I can certainly remember the real-world result – it was the most exhausting match I'd ever played. *



RETRORATED

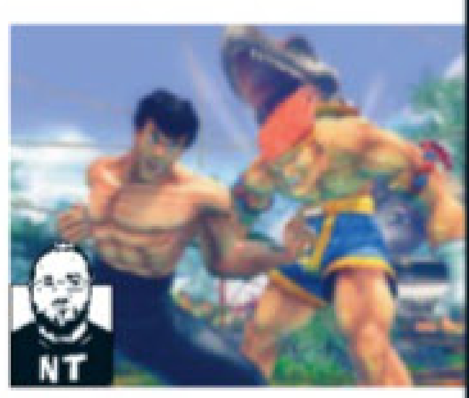


>> Our one big review this month is a look at the latest Street Fighter IV update. Is it still king of the ring or has a challenger usurped its throne? We're just happy Hugo is finally in it...

★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Ultra Street Fighter IV
I absolutely love Hugo as he's a key strategy in 'the Darran Jones factor', getting me sneaky wins.



NICK
Ultra Street Fighter IV
An excellent update of Capcom's classic fighter, but it's only likely to appeal to those already invested.



Ultra Street Fighter IV

IS IT TIME FOR YET ANOTHER NEW CHALLENGER?

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** Xbox 360, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £11.99 (DIGITAL UPDATE) £19.99 RETAIL
- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Street Fighter II* burst onto the scene in 1991 and kicked off a massive interest in the series. Capcom has been at the forefront of fighting development ever since. Ultra sees the character roster for *Street Fighter IV* swell to an amazing 44 fighters.



When *Street Fighter IV* appeared in 2008 it gave the stagnating one-on-one fighter a much-needed kick up the arse and heralded the start of a new beginning for the long dead genre. It's now eight years later, and in that time frame numerous other developers have joined the brawl, meaning that Capcom's once essential fighter now has to fight in order to stay on top of the pile.

Capcom's answer to a host of new challengers is arguably the greatest iteration of its classic game yet, delivering little new content, but balancing the huge roster of available characters so that the game continues to feel fresh and exciting. It's a ballsy move that pays off. It's worth noting though that in doing so, Capcom's latest addition is likely to widen the gulf between casual and hardcore players.

The most notable addition to *Ultra Street Fighter IV* is the inclusion of five new fighters: *Street Fighter III*'s Hugo and Elena, *Street Fighter Alpha*'s Rolento and also *Street Fighter X Tekken*'s Poison who were all last seen in *Street Fighter X Tekken.* The big new is easily the addition of new girl Decapre. While a simple re-skinned version of Cammy didn't justify the sheer levels of hype Capcom generated for her in the many months before her reveal, she does make for a great addition to the series. She's a strong charge character with a range of varied moves that will potentially make her extremely deadly in the hands of skilled opponents. She's certainly not going to be for everyone, but she's a solid addition to the franchise and it's nice to see Capcom investing in a new pugilist who isn't just another Shoto character.

We're also pleased to see the inclusion of *Ultra*'s four other warriors, who all feel significantly different to their *Street Fighter X Tekken* incarnations. It's easy to argue that it's a lazy move on



» [PlayStation 3] Poison is great fun, with a brutal fighting style that sets her apart from the other new brawlers.

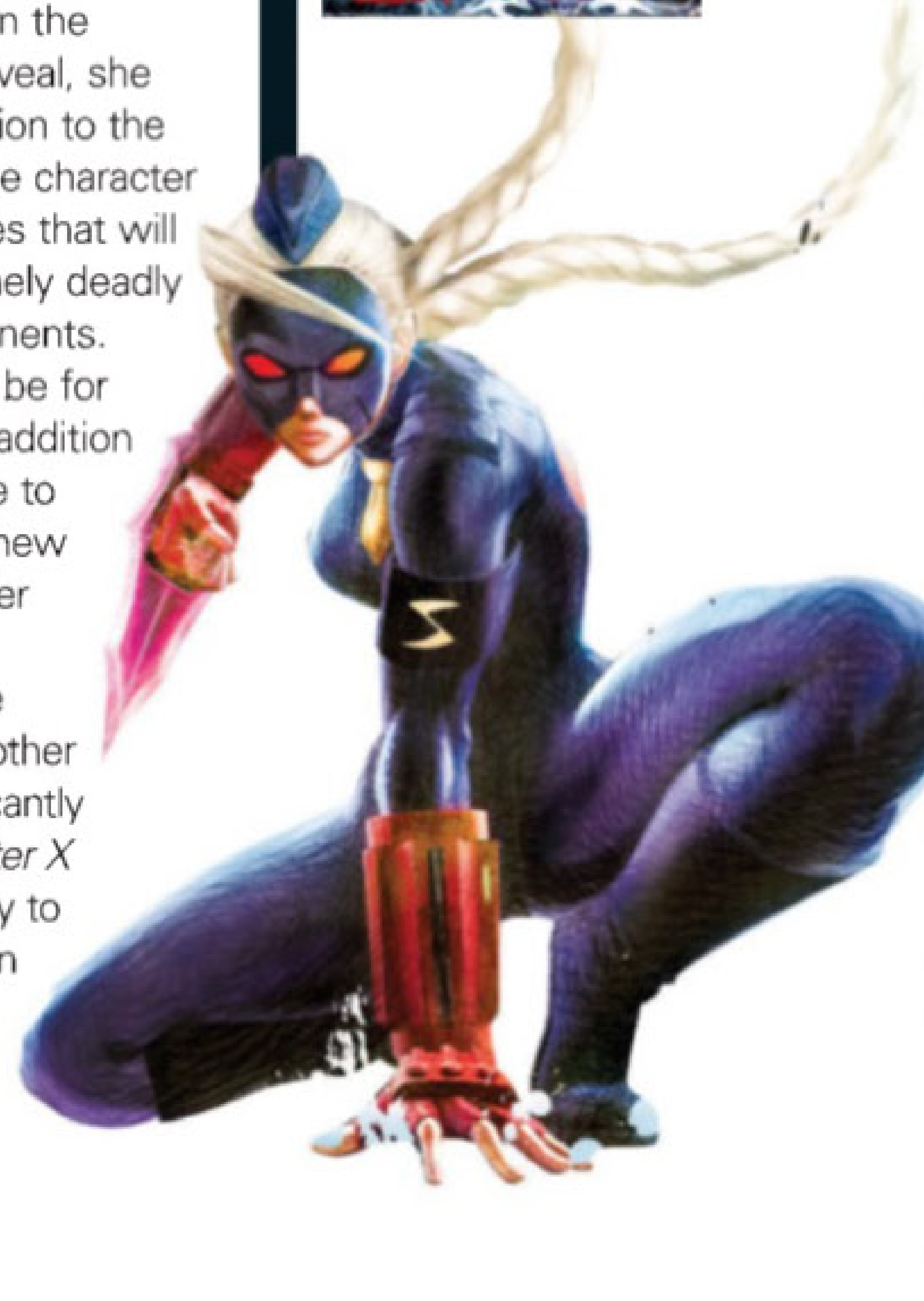
★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
MORTAL KOMBAT (MEGA DRIVE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
BLAZBLUE: CALAMITY TRIGGER (PS3)







» [PlayStation 3] Rolento is another solid addition to Capcom's game and feels suitably different to his *Street Fight X Tekken* outing.



» [PlayStation 3] Don't be put off by her bland appearance, Decapre is a solid addition to the series.



» [PlayStation 3] Elena was a firm favourite in *Street Fighter III*, so it's great to see her included here.

Capcom's part, but there are enough new tricks to learn for each character to make them feel fresh. We've always been big fans of Hugo and Elena, so they're our favourite additions, but both Poison and Rolenta are also promising, with Poison in particular feeling far better than she did in *Street Fighter X Tekken*. In fact she's downright bad-ass, delivering some killer moves and some hilariously over-the-top ultras.

In addition to adding five new characters and their stages Capcom has also overhauled the very play mechanics of the game, most notable with the introduction of Red Focus, Delay Stand and Ultra Combo Double. Red Focus is extremely handy as it allows you to absorb any number of hits at the cost of two segments of your Super bar, making characters with multiple attacks like Yun far easier to deal with. Delayed Standing on the other hand lets you change when you stand up from a hard knockdown, hopefully disrupting your opponent's tempo and giving you a chance to get the upper hand again. The final new addition, Ultra Combo Double handily lets you choose both of your character's Ultra Combos (albeit at the cost of reduced damage). It's a nice touch, allowing for greater flexibility, but also coming to the fore with those characters that have vastly different moves. Strategy has always been at the core of Capcom's fighter, and it now feels far more pronounced, which will upset the button-bashing brigade, but will reward everyone else with a satisfyingly deep fighter.

Three significant gameplay mechanics aren't the only improvements that Capcom has added. It has also tweaked the game on a more fundamental level, tweaks that will most likely be lost on those who don't obsessively play *Street Fighter IV*. You'll most likely notice the changes if you've been away since *Street Fighter IV*'s 2008 debut, but don't worry if it all feels too overwhelming for you. In a classic kitchen sink move, Capcom has also included the different versions of each character, meaning you can stick with Cammy's moveset from the original game if her new moves feel too foreign for you. It's a great touch that adds massively to the longevity of the game and it's a testament to Capcom's experience that everything feels as balanced as it does.

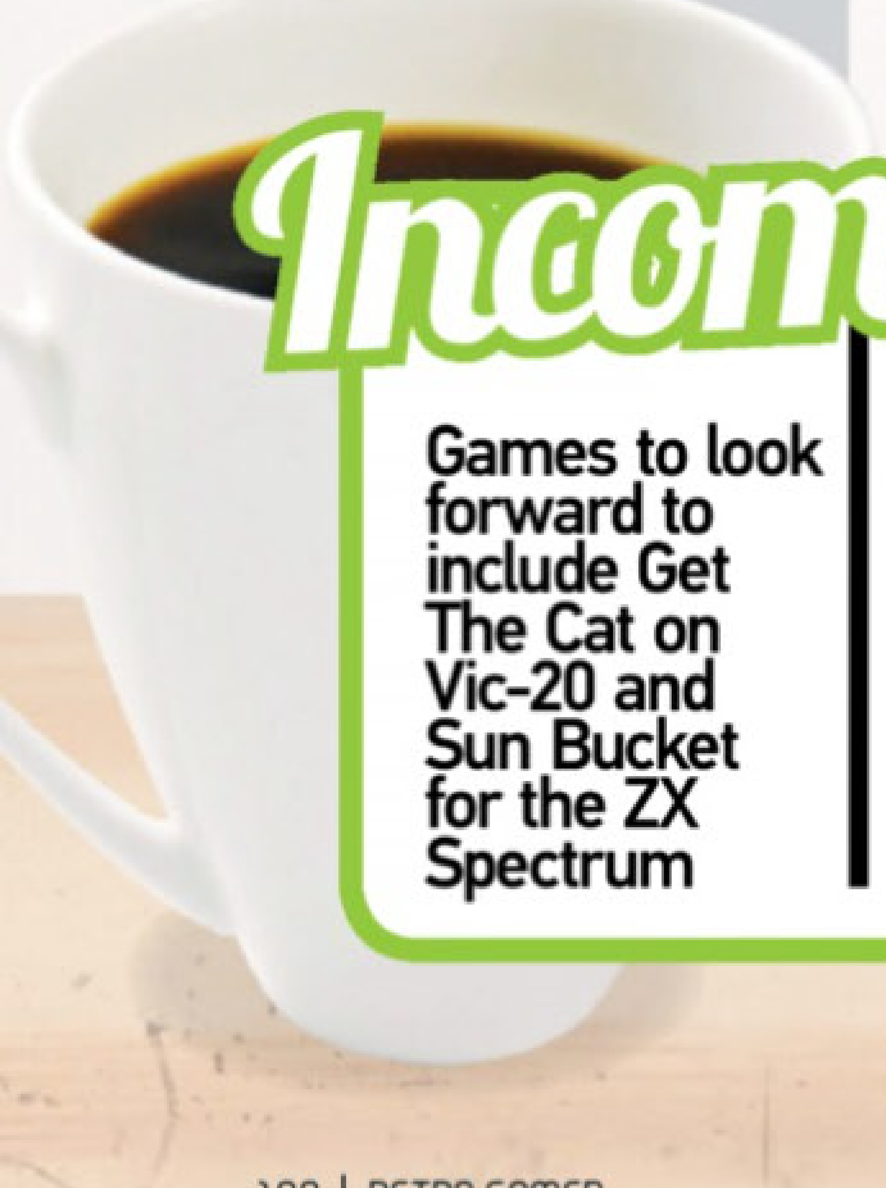
While this is arguably the best version of Capcom's classic brawler, it's worth noting that this is primarily aimed at hardcore players, who will be able to easily jump into the deep end. *Street Fighter IV* has been getting less accessible to casual players with each new update and *Ultra* doesn't really do anything to change that. It still looks fantastic, with insanely good animation and some staggeringly detailed backgrounds, but it can sometimes feel like you're turned up to a club that you're not formally invited to. It's highly unlikely that Capcom will be able to release another update, but it has certainly gone out on a high. *

In a nutshell

There's quite a steep learning curve to it, but this is arguably the most comprehensive version of *Street Fighter IV* to date and should appeal to both long-term veterans and those who might have missed previous expansions.

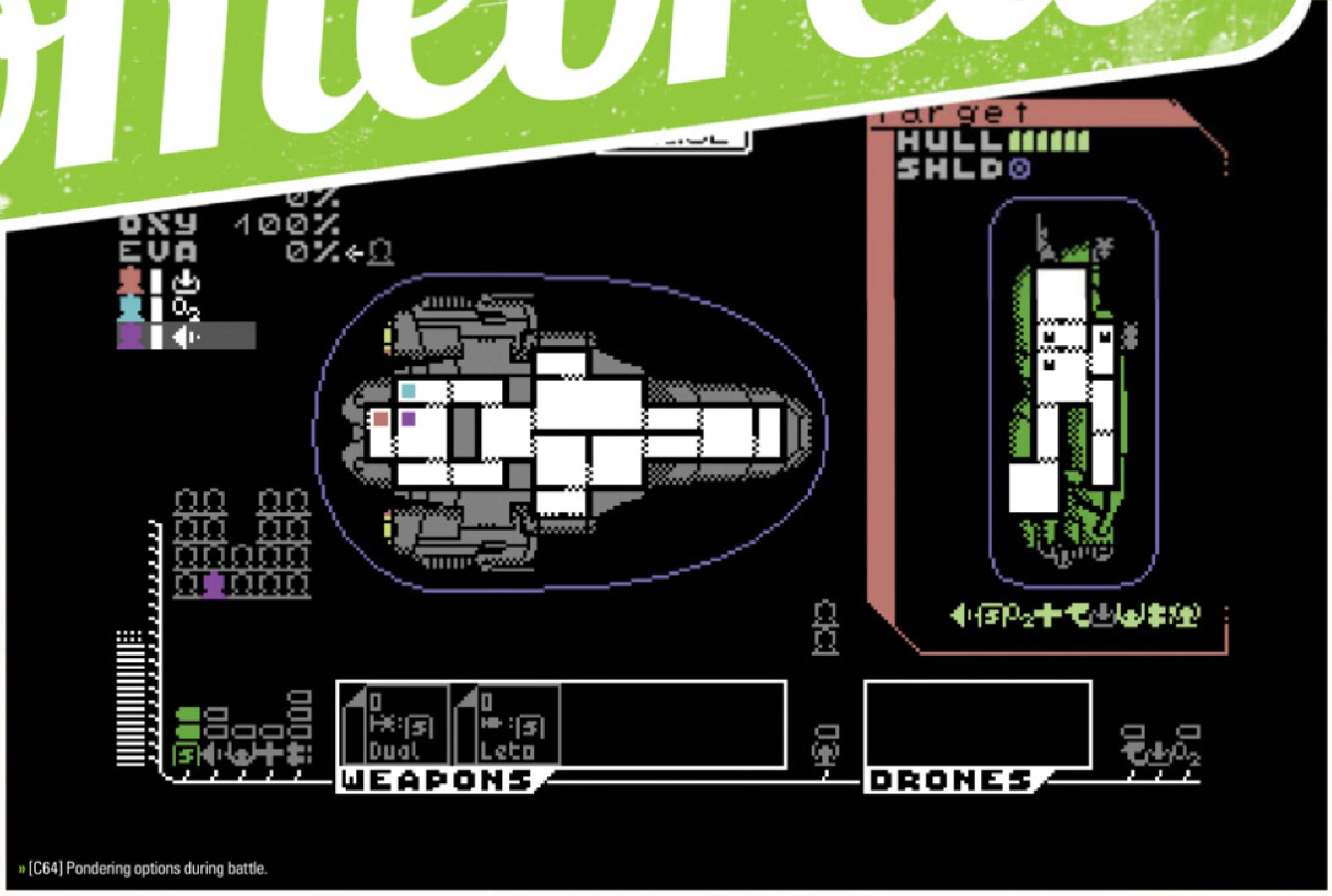
>> Score **85%**

Welcome to Homebrew





>> The new 'Make This' section has been well received so far, so I'm sure that there are topics out there which readers would like to see covered. If you've got something in mind why not get in touch either through the email address on the opposite page or with a message on the RG forum – look for a user called TMR!



» [C64] Pondering options during battle.

THAT'S REALLY FAST!

Indie PC hit lands on Commodore 64

***FTL: Faster Than Light* is a real-time strategy game set in space, originally created for Windows, OSX and Linux by two-person indie developer Subset Games.** The crew of a spacecraft belonging to the Galactic Federation has discovered some vital intelligence that could turn the tide of an ongoing war against the rebel forces, and this data, which is too sensitive to broadcast in any form, must be delivered in person to headquarters by traversing a number of sectors. The ship is equipped with a *Faster Than Light* drive and uses a series of space-bound beacons to hop across each sector towards its destination.

But it isn't just beacons out there in the blackness; there are vessels too, with many spoiling for a fight and others in need of help… and some merely pretending to be the latter while waiting for unsuspecting craft to fall into their trap. Combat between vessels takes place in real time with both ships exchanging fire to cause damage on essential systems as the crews beaver away to keep things working; crew members are needed to steer the ship and keep weapons running, as well as dealing with fires, hull breaches caused by enemy attacks and invaders who have beamed aboard. And then there's the rebels themselves to worry about, their expansion towards Federation space is unrelenting and getting caught isn't going to end well!

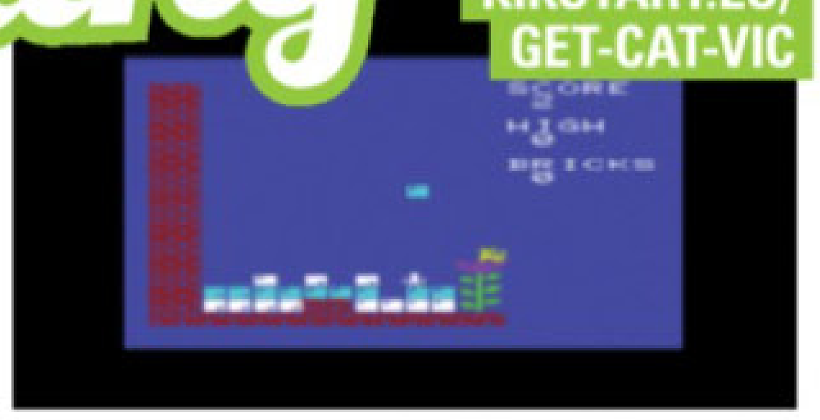
Although it's a fairly early preview at the moment, the C64 version of *FTL* is already pretty playable, looks graphically impressive and demonstrates that the mouse-driven juggling of ship systems and resources can successfully be reworked for an 8-bit computer. Kikstart.eu/ftl-preview-c64 links to the C64 Scene Database entry for that preview and we're looking forward to seeing the final release.

> " It isn't just beacons out there in the blackness; there are vessels too "

Incoming

Games to look forward to include Get The Cat on Vic-20 and Sun Bucket for the ZX Spectrum

KIKSTART.EU/GET-CAT-VIC



▲ Try to use the falling blocks to build a bridge to your cat in the VIC-20 game *Get The Cat*.

▼ A fun, rainbow-hued ZX Spectrum platformer called *Sun Bucket* has been released to add a little colour to our lives.



KIKSTART.EU/SUN-BUCKET-SPEC

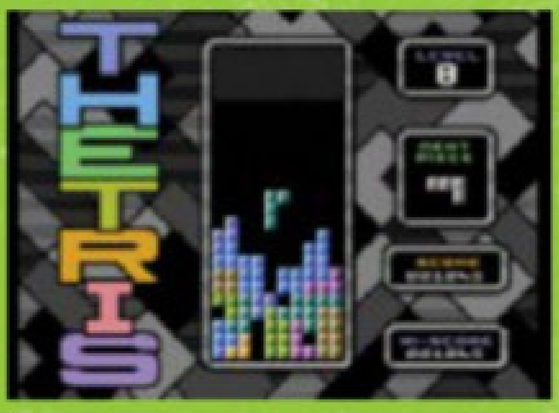
KIKSTART.EU/KIKSTART.EU/SPREE-PREVIEW-ST



▲ *Killing Spree* on the Atari ST was started in the Nineties but might be completed now – try the preview.

YOU'RE GOING TO DIG THIS

Regular readers may remember us mentioning *Rolltris*, an unusual entry into the ABBUC software competition last year which managed to turn *Tetris* on its head by giving the player the power to shuffle the well of fallen pieces around but no influence over the one in motion. After gamers showed an interest in seeing a more traditional version of Alexey Pajitnov's classic in the same engine, developer Marek Pavlik – who works under the pseudonym MaPa – has recently done exactly that with *Thetris*. Kikstart.eu/thetris-a8 goes to Fandal's website.



» [Atari 8-bit] I'm real, I thought I told you.



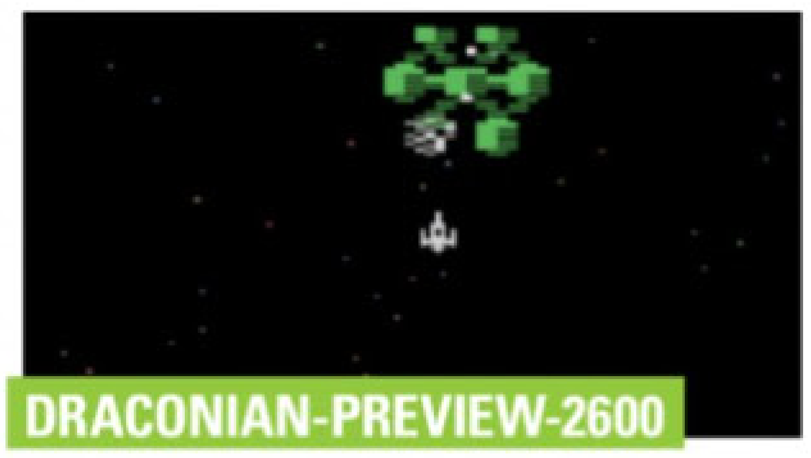
» [C64] You're a funny guy, Sully.

WITHOUT ANY PANTS

It's fairly common knowledge that the C64 conversion of *Commando* is a little lacking. Recently the cracking group Nostalgia has ripped apart the original code, squashed some bugs and added in the missing levels from the coin-op version.

There are also cosmetic features like alternative colours, intermission screens between levels and even the helicopter that drops Super Joe off at the start. *Commando Arcade* is nearly a completely new multi-loading game that can be played either from disk or via EasyFlash cartridge. Kikstart.eu/commando-arcade-c64

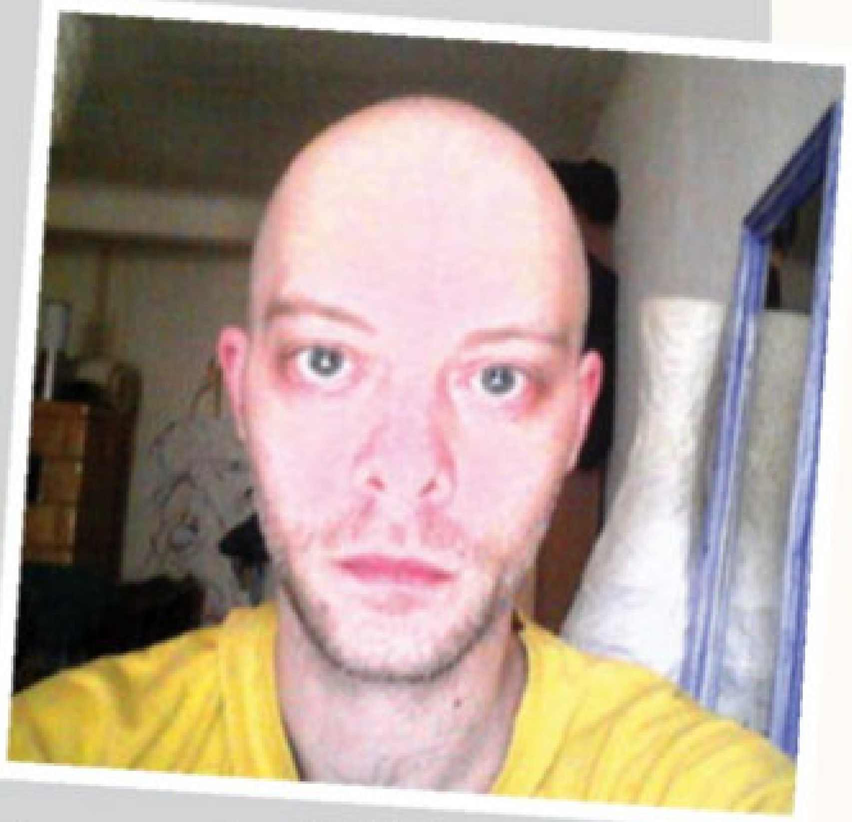
▼ Atari 2600-owning shoot-'em-up fans should soon be able to play *Draconian*, a blaster based on the coin-op *Bosconian*.



DRACONIAN-PREVIEW-2600

Homebrew heroes

Sven Klose works under the pseudonym Pixel and was the developer of the recently released scrolling blaster Pulse on the VIC-20. We flew alongside his spaceship hoping to get a few words about its development and his future plans



What initially gave you the idea of a scrolling shoot-'em-up on the VIC-20?
I found the idea to do soft scrolling and sprites without hardware support quite challenging. Originally, it was supposed to become a jump and run but then I figured I'd be better off trying my hands on a simpler game for starters.

And why did you aim for an unexpanded VIC in particular?
It was my first computer. I've been programming for almost 30 years now but I've never written something for it or a 6502 microprocessor at all. It just had to be done. It's a lovely machine.

What was your main inspiration for *Pulse*?
Mainly *Gradius*. I skipped school for it with a friend when it came out on the NES.

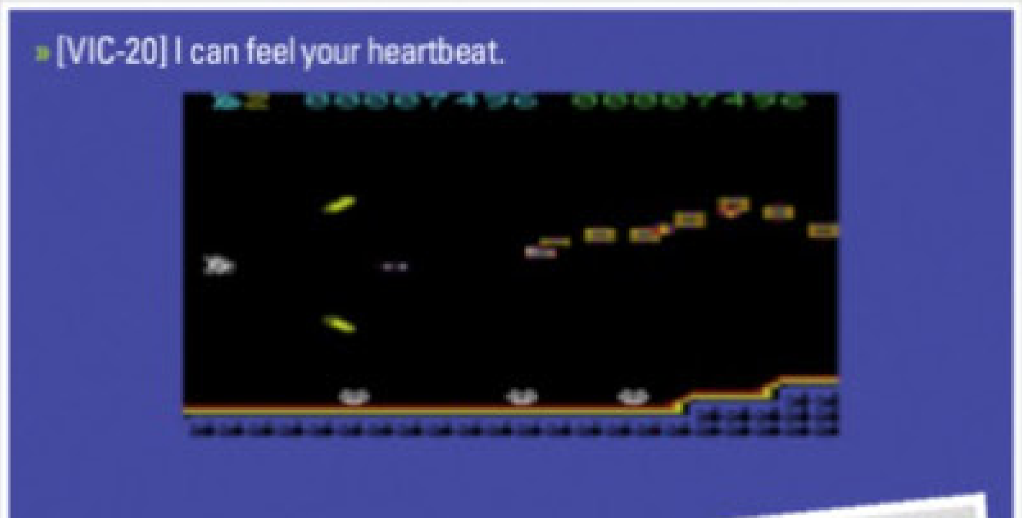
The scrolling in particular is unusual on the VIC, how difficult was it to get working?
If I say 'it was easy' I'll probably get kicked in the butt by a couple of developers! But there's at least a simple idea that made it work and implementing it was straightforward, so that took only about a day or two to do. The trick is to only plot the vertical edges in one frame and scroll the characters without touching the screen in the seven frames following. Every second of the eight frames is skipped, because it's multicoloured.

The edges are combinations of three characters: a leading character where the edge scrolls in and a trailing character that isn't removed from screen. Those trailing characters fill up large areas of the terrain – including the horizontal edges – without actually requiring more CPU time than just rotating a single character. That's why the sprites are never drawn over the terrain.

When push comes to shove only 14 characters are shifted. With more memory one could quadruple the number of tiles easily. Some decent version of a *Super Mario Bros* style game is possible but no; don't look at me like that! I'm working on a tape release of *Pulse* (which is more of a *Pulse 2*) at the moment and if that one is finished in July I plan to bring more VIC-20 scrolling to yet another dimension with *Repulse*.

So is there anything you would have done differently?
Maybe I should have taken a break before its release, because it got faster and smaller afterwards, so the terrain could've been a little bit wider and the explosions more colourful. The feedback for *Pulse* was incredible, so I couldn't hold my horses. This is probably the first thing in my life I ever did right!

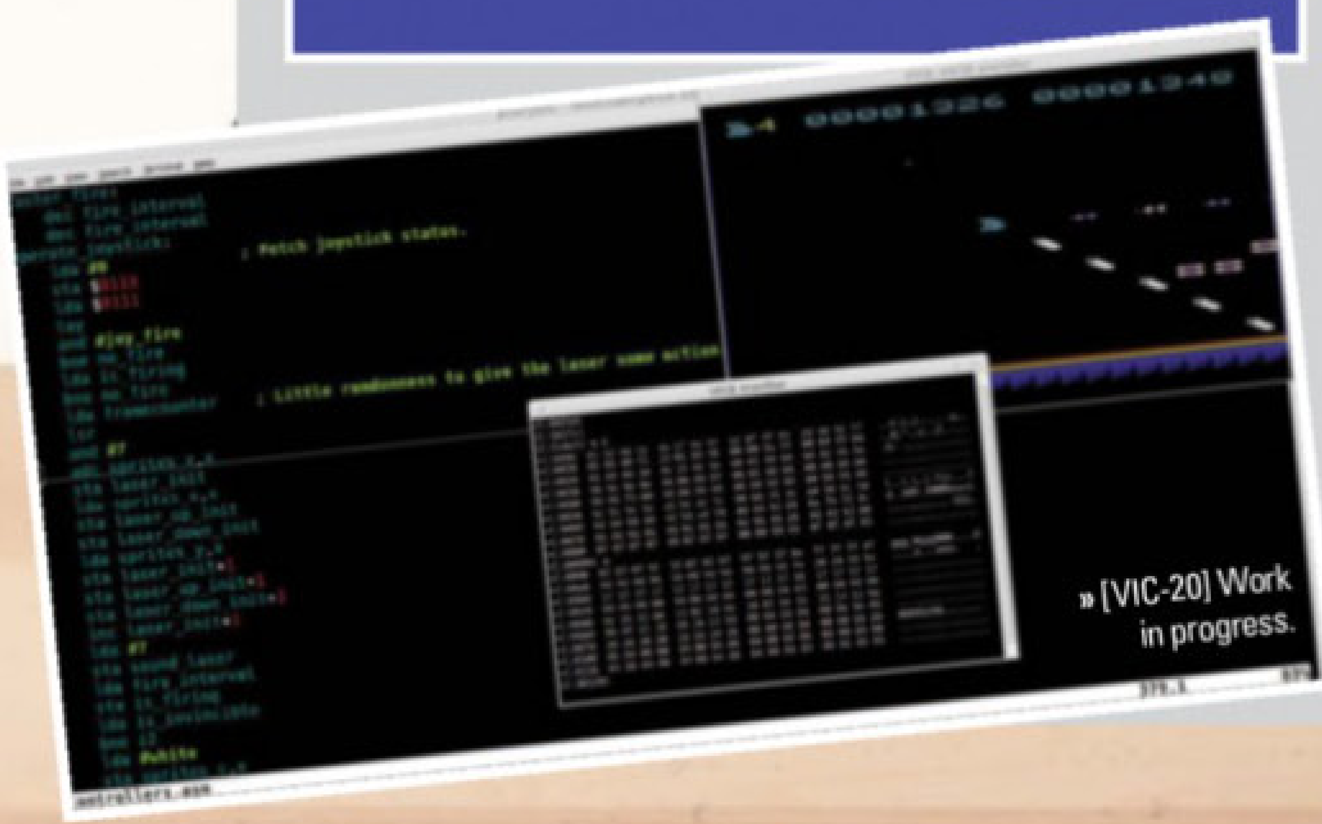
Can you tell us what you're going to be working on next?
It's going to be *Repulse* for VICs with 16K memory expansions. Unfortunately I have an 'interesting' life at the moment, so you've got to be patient I'm afraid.



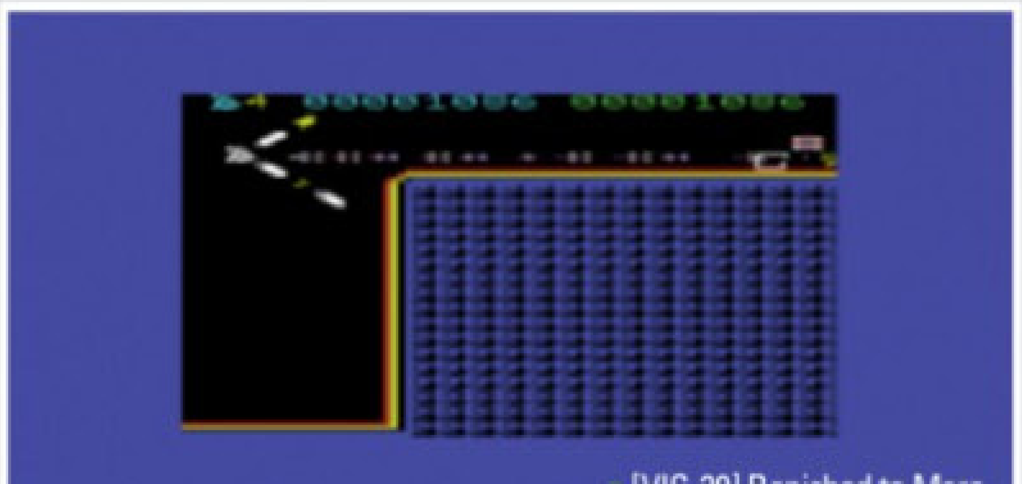
» [VIC-20] I can feel your heartbeat.



» [VIC-20] Kill, maim, destroy!



» [VIC-20] Work in progress.



» [VIC-20] Banished to Mars.

Even more Homebrew REVIEWS

L'ABBAYE DES MORTES

» **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPER:** DARKHORACE AND JERRI
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MORTS-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE



» [ZX Spectrum] A wooded corpse?

In 13th Century France, the Cathars – an expelled subset of Catholicism who preached Christian values – were being systematically wiped out by their former church leaders. This player controls Jean Raymond, one of the Cathar priests currently running for his very life, who has been chased into what appears to be the sanctuary of an abandoned abbey. But things aren't as they seem and, after barring the sturdy door, Jean begins to explore his new surroundings and discovers parchments that explain that a dozen of his brothers have already tried the same thing only to be murdered.

And if that wasn't bad enough, there's something very evil lurking in the ruins to worry about too so, despite the distraction of a bloodthirsty mob braying on the front door, the priest decides that his best course of action is to uncover that hidden evil in the abbey while collecting the crosses of his fallen brothers along the way. This journey tales place in a number of areas mostly in the catacombs of the abbey where Jean Raymond will need to avoid the evil creatures whose mere touch will snatch one of his lives away and dump him back at the last gravestone-like checkpoint. There are also levers to find which will reveal new places to go when used, extra lives to replace any that have been lost and further scrolls that offer helpful, if sometimes cryptic, advice.

L'Abbaye Des Mortes is a conversion of indie developer Locomalito's Spectrum-themed Windows game of the same name and, apart from having some colour clash and a few graphical differences, it looks and plays very similarly. Locomalito has said previously that, along with his visit to Languedoc – the region of France where the story is set that was once a stronghold for the Cathars – the inspirations for this game were *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, so tricky platforming and strict collision detection are the order of the day. It can be frustrating but each game will see our hero get further into his quest.

90%



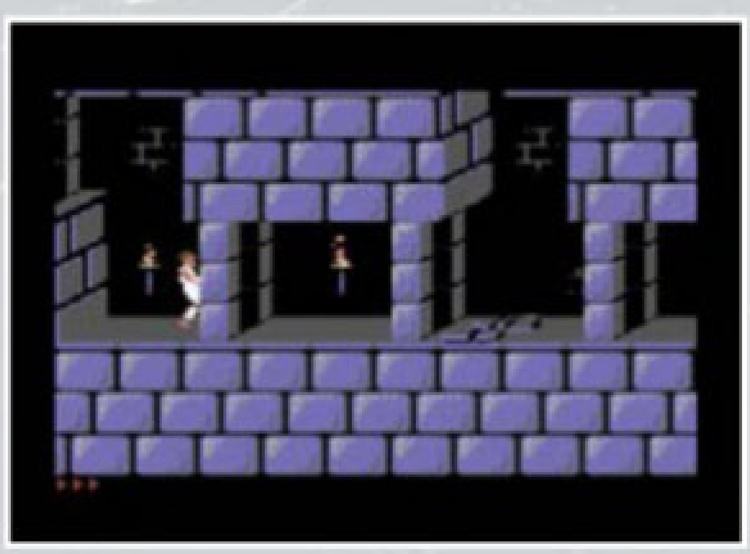
» [ZX Spectrum] Watch his hair turning grey.

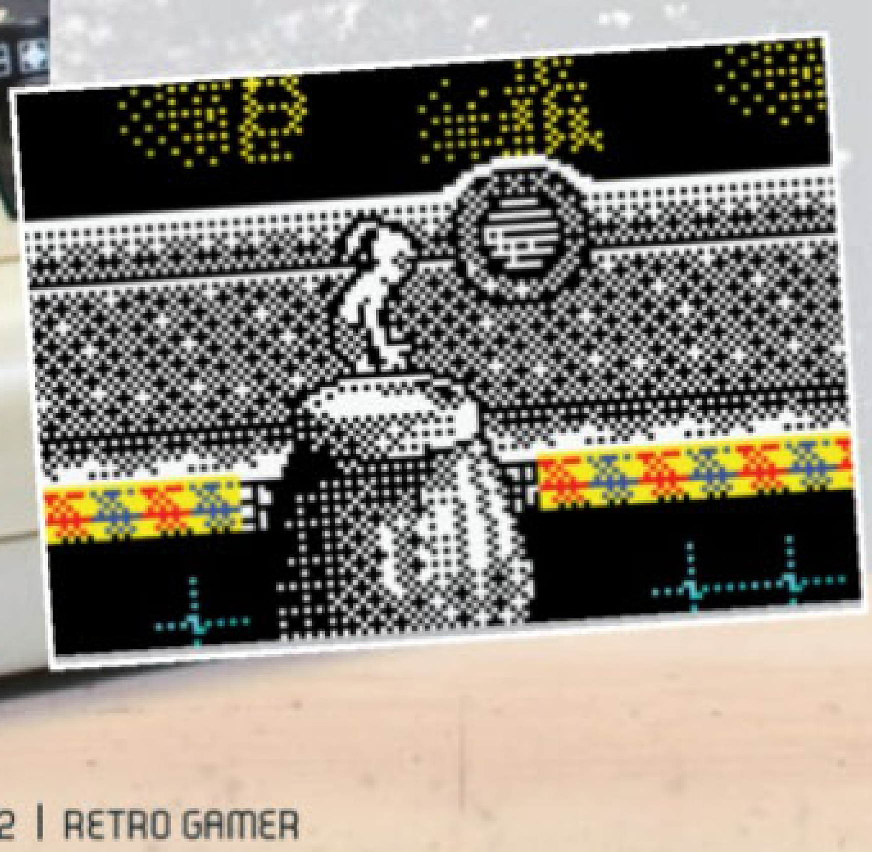
Make this

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: object priorities

NEW

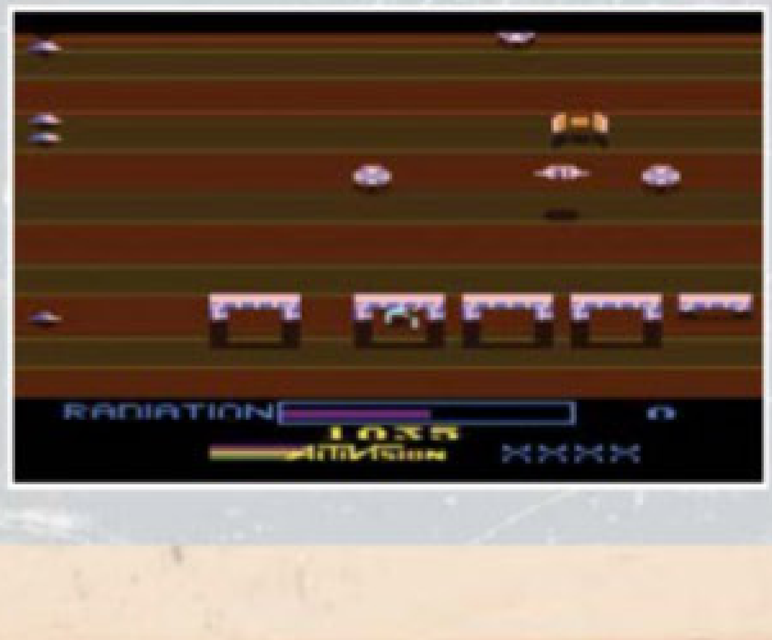
1 Although it's quite easy to do at least with some 8-bits, very few 2D games use masking to create depth. For example, here's an image from Brothers Software's *Oddworld: Abe's Mission* on the Spectrum where Abe can only partially be seen behind the foreground landscape.

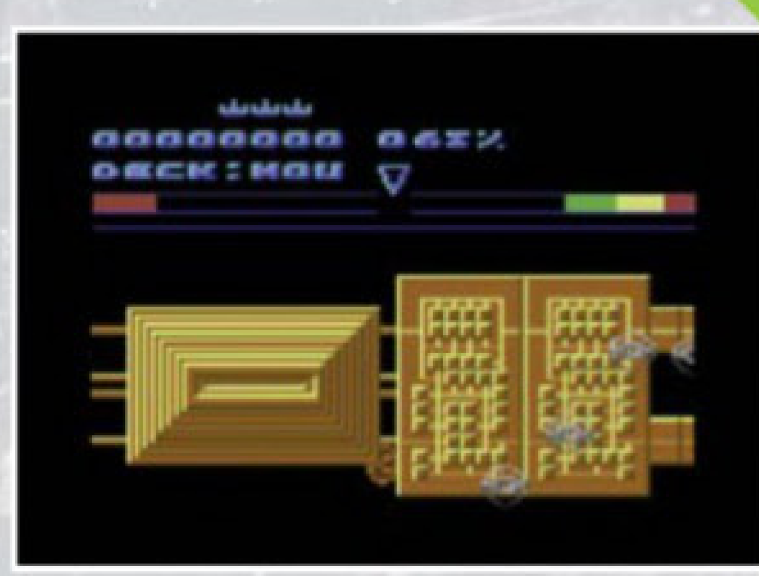




2 The game keeps a map of the screen that says where the player will pass behind background that is used to edit the sprite; in the C64 version of *Prince Of Persia* the prince is a hardware sprite but clipped in software handled like Abe.

3 There's other ways to do this more quickly with machines that have hardware sprites, such as designing graphics to use colours which can be set to have priority over sprites; Activision's *Pastfinder* on the Atari 8-bit handles the small bridges in that way so the player can pass under them.

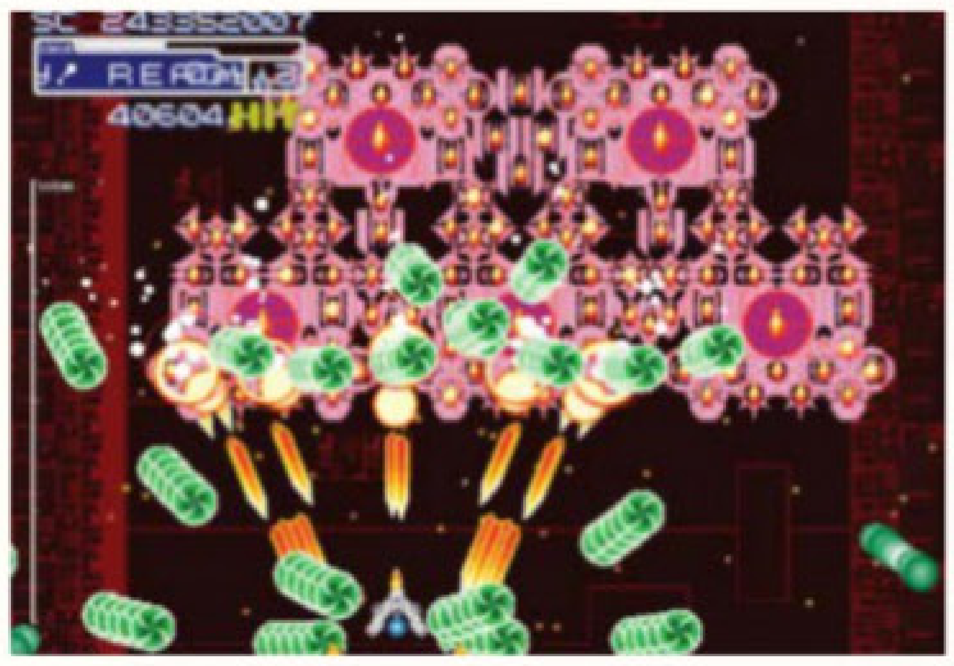




4 Being able to move above and below the playfield can be used as a game mechanic; for example the C64 version of *WAR* where the player has to duck under the dreadnought in order to dock with it at the end of each stage.

GALAXY FRONTIER

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** HELLO WORLD PROJECT, ALPHA SECRET BASE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GALAXY-FRONTIER-WIN » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Windows] Shine your wings forward to the sun.

***Galaxy Frontier* is** a no-nonsense Japanese scrolling shoot-'em-up with lots of bullets and explosions; as always a lone spaceship armed with some nifty toys to destroy things with has been sent into battle against a ridiculously large fleet of enemies. In this case the craft is armed with an orange spread shot, the more focused blue beam for larger enemies and a green 'nuclear' weapon which needs charging.

The graphics are reasonable and sound does it's job well – there's some radio chatter in the background which adds some atmosphere but can't actually be made out among the gunfire and explosions – and the difficulty curve is unusually shallow so fans of the genre will probably be able to smash their way through after a few practice goes while casual players still stand a chance.

84%



» [DOS] I shiver to the bone.

THORN

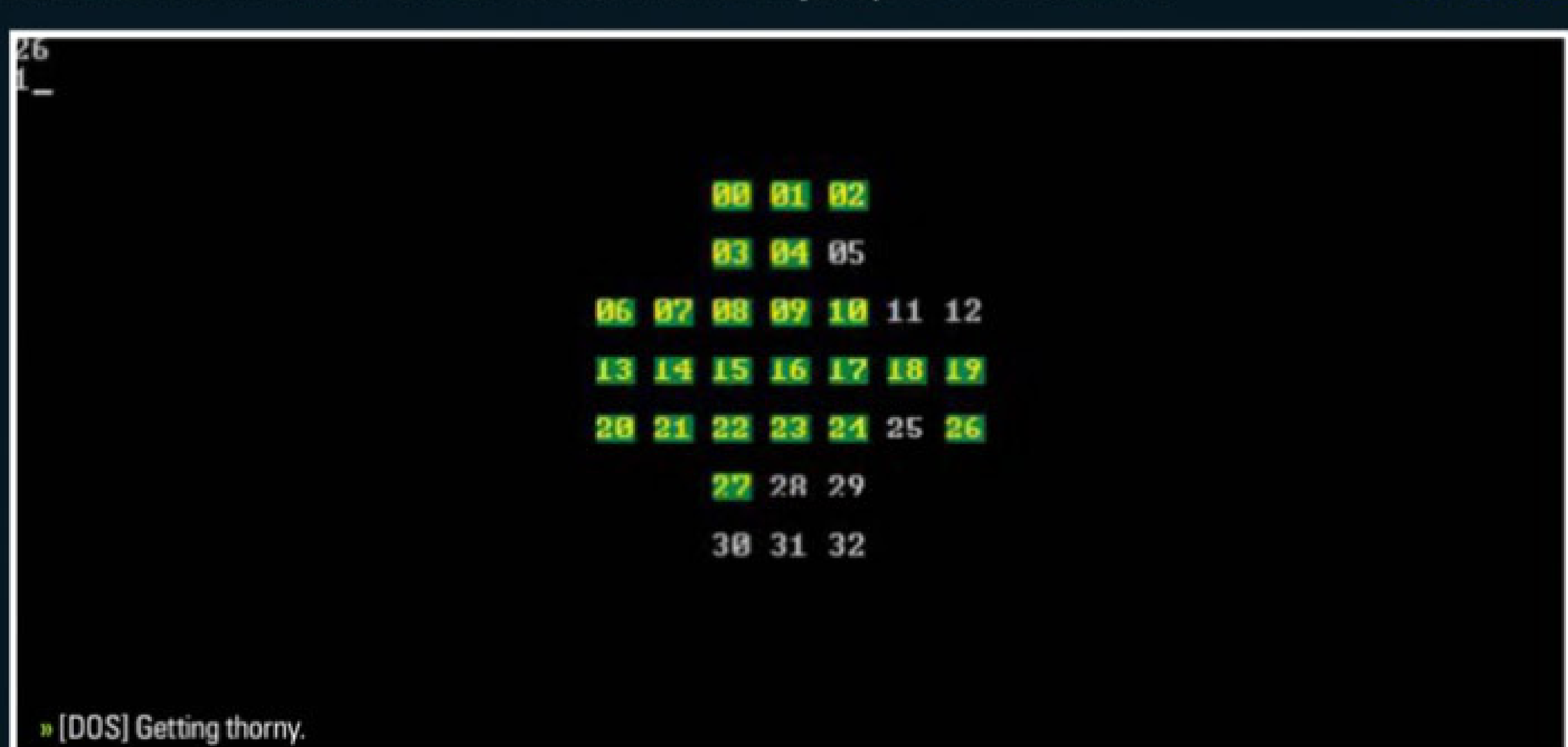
» **FORMAT:** DOS » **DEVELOPER:** RODRIGO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/THORN-DOS » **PRICE:** FREE

The user interface is more than a little clunky and there are no graphics to write home about, but *Thorn* is a brand new DOS game that will take full advantage of your 286 with VGA!

The play area starts with all but one cell occupied by thorns; these can only move if the cell next to them is occupied and the one after that is free and any thorn hopped over will be removed from play. The game is won if the entire board is cleared apart from a single thorn in the central cell and lost when no more moves are possible.

Okay, it's just an implementation of *Peg Solitaire*, but kudos is due for making it run from 256 bytes and it's still a fun challenge as long as players don't cheat and use the 'feature' which allows thorns to jump out of bounds.

61%



» [DOS] Getting thorny.



» [Atari 8-bit] They're PLOTting against me!

PIXEROIDS

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** XEEN
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PIXEROIDS-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

***Pixeroids* is a** ridiculously simple action game; forget character development or even a plot for that matter, because all the player needs to worry about is keeping their joystick-controlled blue flashing square safely away from the white dots bouncing around and the red barrier at the edges of the playfield for as long as they can. Don't be put off this, it's much better than it sounds.

At the beginning of a game that's easy; the dots move around in a pack with just a few strays and don't take much effort to avoid, until they start to ricochet off the walls, each other and the cluster of otherwise harmless purple-ish dots that jiggle randomly around the screen.

So while it might look and indeed be an absurdly simple game, *Pixeroids* still manages to have a simple, addictive quality which will have at least some players mumbling "just a few minutes" to loved ones before playing for another half an hour.

70%

BARBARIAN

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** LECORNEC FRANÇOIS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BARBARIAN-MD » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Mega Drive] Exit, stage right.

An evil sorcerer known as Drax threatened unspeakable things to the people of Kewelled unless they handed over the lovely princess Marianna to him and, surprisingly, it actually worked! But despicable and powerful as he is, Drax has now put a generous offer on the table; if the villagers find a champion to defeat his seven demonic warriors, he'll hand her back. So far nobody has succeeded, but a new challenger has appeared from the wastelands brandishing a broadsword and looking like Wolf from TV's *Gladiators*…

If you're already looked at the screenshots you might be puzzled, but this *Barbarian* is apparently the C64 version modified to run on a Mega Drive. Along with retaining the graphics and getting quite close to the palette, it still keeps the controls down to eight D-pad directions and one button too.

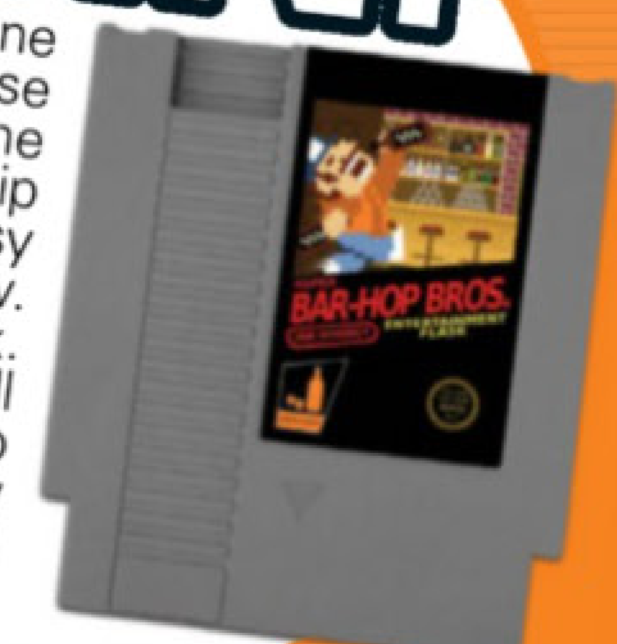
86%

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

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Get one of these awesome novelty hip flasks, courtesy of www.funstock.co.uk. You'll never go thirsty again!



STAR LETTER

REB ALERT

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

Thank you for the flood of memories stirred by the excellent MC Lothlorien article in issue 129 of **Retro Gamer**!

Johnny Reb was the first ever game I played on the Spectrum, which I purchased on the same day that I bought the machine itself. I remember beating a couple of friends trying to cross that damn bridge one snowy Christmas Eve!

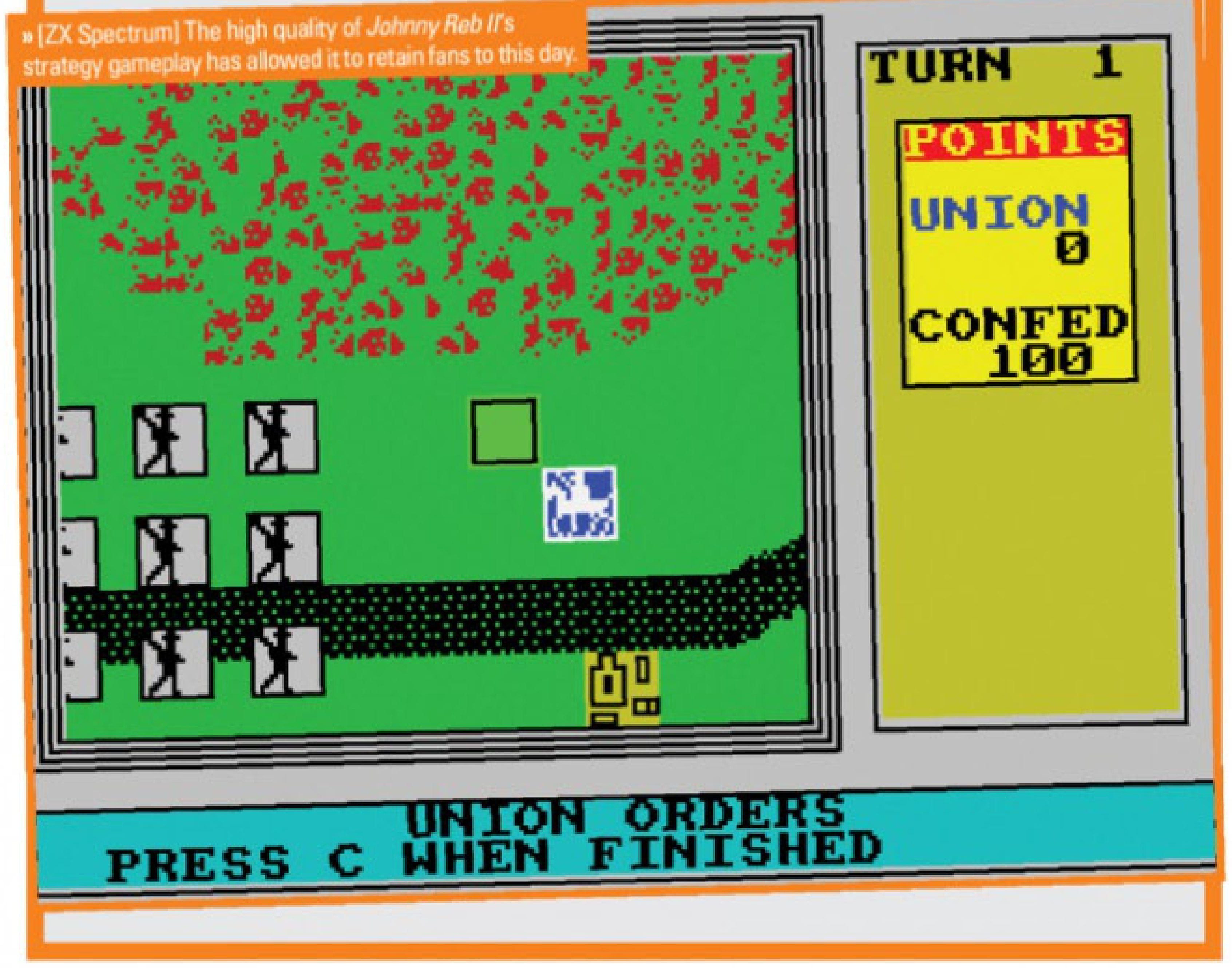
With regards to the sequel, well that ate up even more hours of my time. The flexibility of being able to place troops, fences and houses was a bonus while watching routing troops rally to return to the fight several times, as well as keeping them supplied with ammunition from wagons – themselves liable to become casualties of war as much as everybody else – was an innovative concept for the time. Plus, even though sadly not mentioned in your article, the continuous mode made the game a real-time strategy pioneer as well.

If MC Lothlorien had not introduced me to war games all those years ago, I may not have had my deep passion for the current *Total War* franchise. High praise indeed!

D O'Connor

We're glad to hear of your nostalgia trip following the MC Lothlorien feature – that's what we always hope to inspire when putting together a feature. This is particularly true when we're remembering companies that fell by the wayside early and don't receive a lot of recognition elsewhere. It's always important to recognise the roots of today's hits too – without those early war games there wouldn't be a *Total War* series to enjoy now. It's too much to bear thinking about really, isn't it?

> **"The continuous mode made the game a pioneer as well"**



» [ZX Spectrum] The high quality of *Johnny Reb II*'s strategy gameplay has allowed it to retain fans to this day.



THE JOY OF NOT EXPLODING

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

I just wanted to second the idea put forward by Paul Holden in the 'I Love Not Exploding' letter in issue 127's Mailbag, it would be a good subject for an article. Maybe you could not only cover the topic of regional issues, but the issues with the newer HDTV models. I recall a YouTube video where a guy got a Sega Mega Drive and used some type of cable/converter thing to run graphics and audio on a modern TV as good as, if not better than on an old tube TV. Anyway, great magazine!

Adam Blake

We've had a few letters along similar lines now and it seems like there's a demand for features that cover these aspects of retro gaming, which are of great importance to collectors as technology moves on. We're happy to let you know that we're planning to introduce a series of guides along these lines in future issues – how to run imported machines, how to get the best from old hardware on new TVs, how to clean up your cartridges and more.

HE'S A COP KILLER

Dear **Retro Gamer**!

I am just writing to tell you how happy I was with the most recent issue – it has brought back some wonderful memories for me and my dad thanks to your excellent little pieces on Ocean's *RoboCop* and *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*.

I started getting into computer gaming at around age seven (I'm 32 now) and while we had owned cassette-driven computers in the past, my memories of them are pretty hazy at best. No, the Atari ST was where my home computer gaming journey properly began. I had a ritual back then, stuck to almost religiously – Friday night, get picked up by dad for the weekend, get dinner, rent a couple of videos; Saturdays were generally spent either at Liverpool Museum or the arcades at Southport.

However, before any of that was indulged in, first thing on a Friday after getting into Dad's flat, I completed



» [Arcade] *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters* is one tough cookie, but a fun game.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH



The beautiful game

The office World Cup is on via EA's official tie-in game! Nick (France) and Jon (Greece) went out in the group stage, but organiser Steve – who *somehow* ended up as Brazil – is through to the final. Darran's Germany inexplicably made it to the round of 16, despite a 15-0 loss to the USA in the group…

RoboCop on the ST. It was an unspoken thing, it was just something that was done before we watched a film or played a tabletop game. I think I must have completed that game around 400 times – I could probably have done most of the game with my eyes closed, I knew exploits and glitches, how to reach places you weren't meant to etc and I remember the last time I ever played it vividly, because I only got hit four times in the entire playthrough! I remember even at that age that it was almost like a little switch tripped in my brain that said 'well, that's it, there's nothing more you can do with this game, that's about as good as it's going to get!'

Thanks also for the *Robot Monsters* piece and for reassuring me that it wasn't just rose-tinted memories I had – the ST version *is* as good as I remembered! I never finished it, but it was a great game, full of fun and good-looking to boot.

As an aside, my dad dug out the ST after we reminisced about this. He had kept all the games as well, including *RoboCop*. I just managed to get to ED-209 on the first level before dying. Just as I was about to mutter an expletive and mention how I used to beat this boss literally one-handed while stuffing nuggets into my mouth, my eldest daughter who is three years old said "you should have jumped then, daddy."

She was right, and as it turns out I'm not done with *RoboCop* yet! It also speaks volumes about how much I have matured in the intervening years that I still find the vaguely fart-like sound of the three-way shot amusing as well!

Congrats on an excellent issue and keep up everything you are doing.

Aidan Degg

PS: More stuff like the hardest games feature as well please – awesome stuff.

Many thanks Aidan! It's easy to forget how hard some games are if you haven't played them in a while – we were playing pass-the-pad in the office for a while for this issue's *RoadBlasters* feature, as it was a real struggle.

CAN YOU DIG IT?

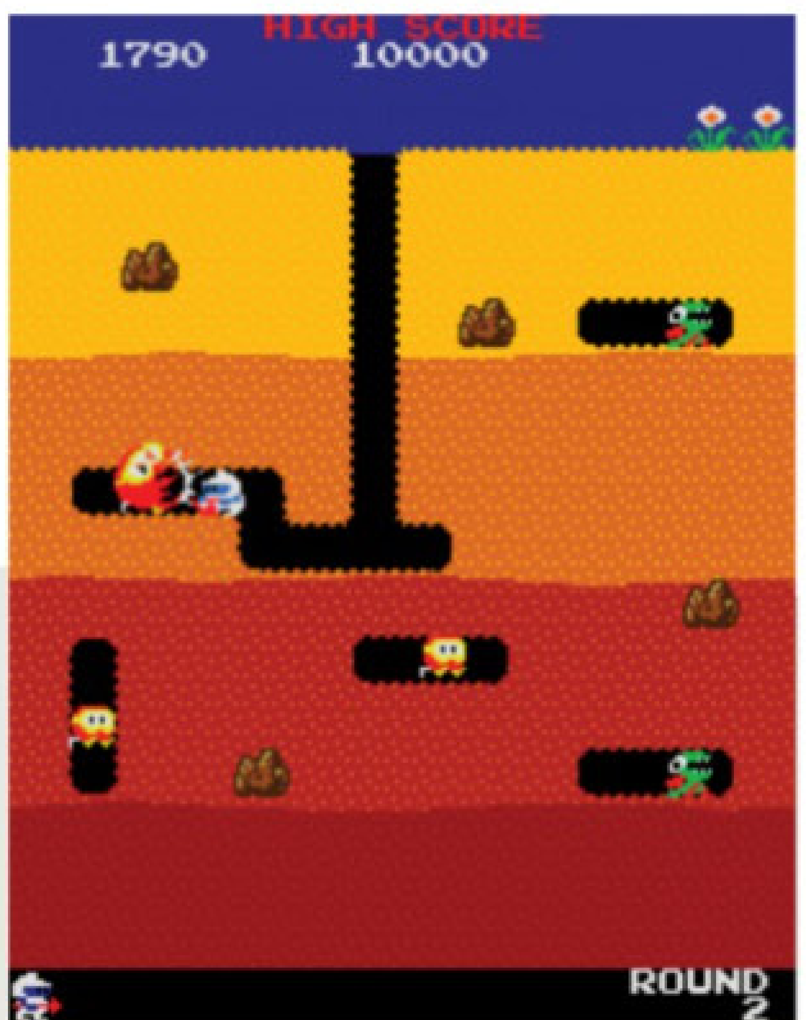
Hi **RG,**

I'm just writing in to ask, has the magazine has ever done a feature on *Dig Dug*? I grew up with the Atari 2600 version and would love to know what the other conversions were like.

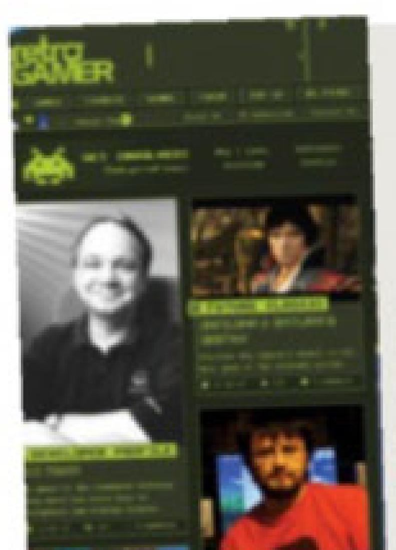
Keep up the good work!

Tim Rollin

We haven't yet Tim – there was a *Dig Dug II* Reader Revival way back in issue 79, but that's about it. It would make a nice cover though, wouldn't it?



» [Arcade] Despite the fact that it rarely turns up in the magazine, the **Retro Gamer** team is very fond of *Dig Dug*.



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your favourite interactive movie

ArchaicKoala
Dragon's Lair 2 for me. I first saw this game on *Games Master* and was just blown away by how amazing the graphics looked. I realise now that there was barely a game to play but it still looks pretty!

WoodyCG
I can recall playing *Firefox* and *Dragon's Lair* in the arcade, but my most fond memories are of *Rebel Assault* on the PC.

NorthWay
Dragon's Lair. Simply because when you are first you get the biggest impact. And what an impact! Seeing it for the first time was like being hit with a sledgehammer – it left you speechless and breathless.

Ryan_McN
The 7th Guest. Completely blew me away when I saw it running on my mate's PC. Filled with brainteasers and a nice soundtrack too.

The Laird
I have to go with *Chaos Control* on the Philips CD-i and Sega Saturn. It's a great looking shooter that is much more interactive and playable than other FMV games in this genre.

ncf1
Gabriel Knight II: The Beast Within. Just criminal that there weren't more brilliant adventures made like this; it has this timelessness about it when done right.

joefish
Galaxian 3: Attack Of The Zolgear – great multiplayer blasting with brilliant multi-projector backdrop scenery, branching attack routes and massive pre-rendered explosions for successful takedowns.

Szczepaniak
Ground Zero Texas. Cool story about aliens bodysnatching humans and scenarios with multiple outcomes so you can never be certain who the alien is.

Hiro
The X-Files Game for me. While not flawless and frustrating at times, it's the FMV game that hooked me the most, great tension. And the death scenes were awesome.

Mire Mare
I liked *Road Avenger*! It flowed really well once I learned the pattern of the other vehicles and sequences needed to avoid crashing. Okay, so it was basically a memory test but a frustratingly fun memory test!

paranoid marvin
Mad Dog McCree as it's my favourite gun game, with plenty of humour.

retro GAMER

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Revival 2014

Chris Wilkins is well known in the retro community thanks to a number of events he has organised. Here he tells us about Revival 2014 and its special guest star John Romero



» Event organiser Chris Wilkins sits down with **Retro Gamer** to talk about this year's upcoming event.

So how did you manage to persuade John Romero to visit Revival?
I had pinged John a message a couple of weeks before asking if he would sign some *Doom* posters that could be raffled at Revival – I had heard nothing back. I contact[ed] his wife asking if she and John were ever in the UK. To my surprise I got a quick reply saying they were over in the summer, just three days before the Revival event! We exchanged a few more emails and I mentioned we would have deathmatch *Doom* and *Quake* LANs at the event. The reply was, 'You had to say deathmatch didn't you! John would love to come'. And that was that.

Who else is attending?
We will be having an Ocean Q&A panel with some familiar faces from last year's event such as Simon Butler and Paul Hughes. We will have some new faces such as Chris Urquhart and Dawn Drake. I hope to have at least 15 Ocean software guys and gals on the panel.

We will also have a US Gold Q&A panel with Geoff Brown joining us on Skype from Mexico to talk about US Gold and the up and coming book on his company. Jeff Minter will be joining us and showing off his retro back-catalogue as well as his inspired new titles including their integration with the new Oculus Rift VR hardware.

Archer MacLean has been a long-time supporter of our events and will be joining us again this year. We will be setting up a *Dropzone* competition with the winner playing Archer at his own game on an Atari 800.

At last year's event we had Philip Oliver talk about the games industry and run a retro quiz – this year we have his brother Andrew in attendance to do a talk and a Q&A.

Do you have any sponsors this year?
Yes, we have Retrogamebase.co.uk who own a great retro shop in London and Ultimarc who can supply the arcade hobbyist with all the parts they need to make their own arcade machine.

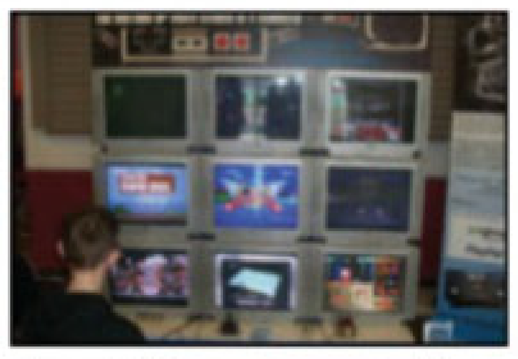
What machines will appear?
Our partners Retro Games Party and UKVac will be sponsoring the arcade area – so expect to see upwards of 60 arcade machines complemented by a suite of pinball tables. Turnarcades' *Fix it Felix* cabinet will also be appearing and will be complemented by our brilliant *Revival Survival* game based on our very own event, written by Revival organiser Craig Turner. The Retro Computer Museum will be supplying over 50 retro systems to play on and The Centre of Computer History will be bringing a whole range of multiplayer and interactive systems and games to play on. In all we expect to have over 150 retro systems, 60-plus arcade machines, 15-plus pinball tables and whatever else that could turn up between now and 9 August.

How many people are you expecting?
Last time we attracted 1,200 visitors on the Saturday and a little less on the Sunday. We are aiming for 2,000-plus on each day this year.

Why do you think shows like Revival continue to be popular?
The events I organised going way back to 2005 attracted a couple of hundred visitors – they were cosy, atmospheric and had a great community feeling and spirit to them. With Revival the numbers have increased but we have managed to keep the same kind of atmosphere. We aim to grow this year, but intend to keep the atmosphere that we have become synonymous with. *







» It wouldn't be a retro event without lots of awesome retro machines.

» Developers like Archer MacLean will be on hand to talk about coding.





» Revival continues to grow in size and has become very popular.

Head to www.revivalretroevents.com to buy tickets and receive more information


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Banjo-Kazooie

Gregg Mayles and Chris Sutherland reveal the colourful history behind Rare's popular platform franchise

More inside

- Sid Meier's Pirates!
- Resident Evil 4
- Shinobi
- Agent X
- Oddworld Inhabitants

Zynaps

■ Dominic Robinson heads back to 1987 and explains how he created his superb Spectrum shoot-'em-up

First-Person Shooters

■ Our latest Bluffer's Guide talks to several veterans and examines how it has turned into one of gaming's most important genres

Atari 7800

■ Developers celebrate Atari's 30-year-old console, while we highlight its best homebrew games and arcade conversions

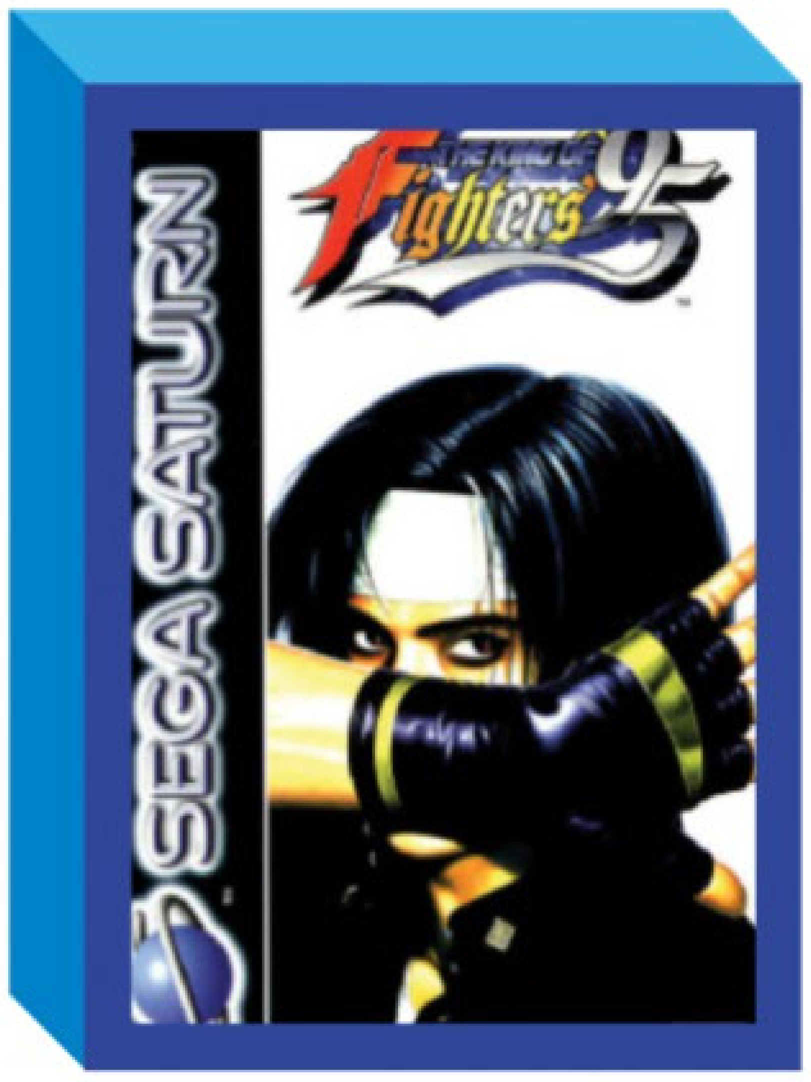


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ENDGAME



THE KING OF FIGHTERS '95

» SNK's decision to shove some of its best-loved characters together in The King Of Fighters '94 was genius, creating the big fighting crossovers we know and love today and ensuring a sequel. With Rugal defeated in the first tournament, the identity of the sponsor remained shrouded in mystery – we join the Korean team of Kim, Chang and Choi shortly after he's been found and thoroughly kicked in…



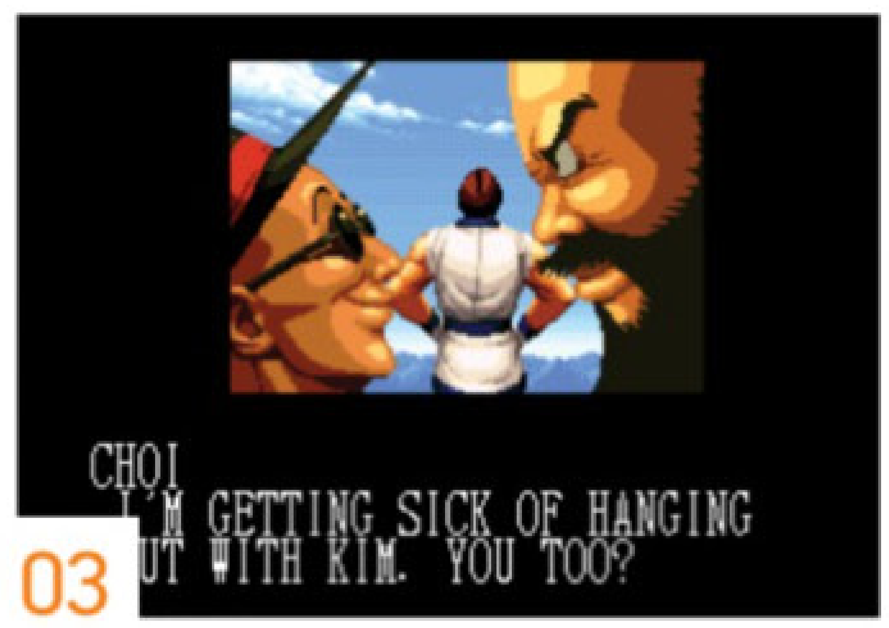
01

» Surprise! It was the villainous Rugal again, now in the form of Omega Rugal after making a deal with a mysterious force. His new body appears to be malfunctioning a bit since his defeat at the hands of the Koreans, though.



02

» Rugal's really had it this time – he begins to disintegrate, sealing his fate. Knowing that he's close to death, he does what any villain does and promises vengeance, before signing off with a remarkably mild insult. Try harder, man.



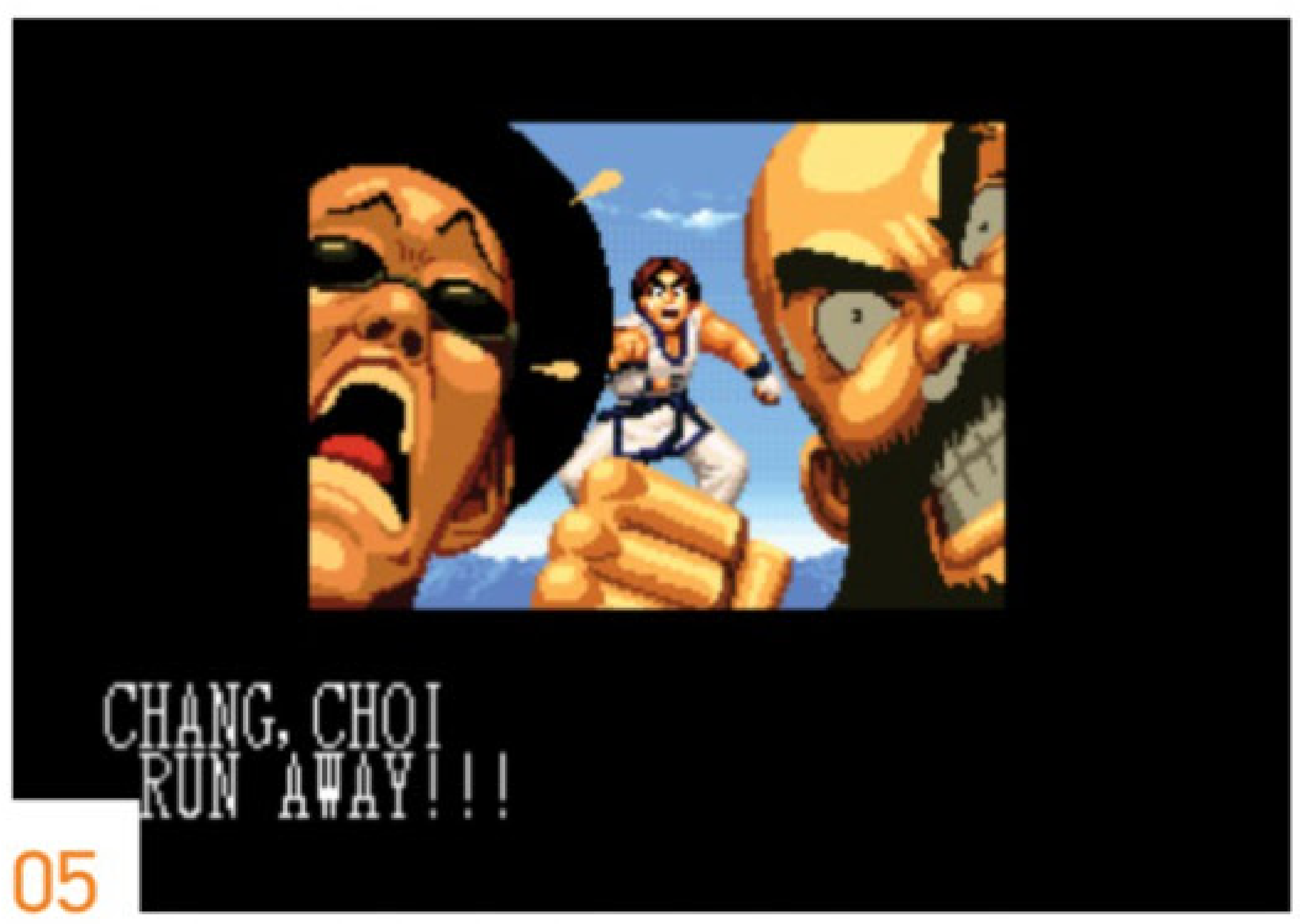
03

» Having defeated an extraordinarily powerful fighter, Chang and Choi are back to whispering behind Kim's back. The criminal buddies aren't happy with their chaperone. They're sick of him, in fact, as he's clearly not one of the cool kids.



04

» To emphasise just how boring he is, Kim suggests that training for the next tournament starts tomorrow. You might imagine that he'd take a break, but no. He's not satisfied with defeating just one superhuman with mystical powers, and wants to take on the one that will inevitably run the next tournament.



05

» Being rather more genre-savvy than the idiotic do-gooder they've been lumbered with, Chang and Choi recognise the flaw in this plan and attempt to scarper. It's a valiant effort that inevitably ends in failure, as the dysfunctional trio is reunited in *The King Of Fighters '96*. Better luck next time!